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Romantic Relationships: Beliefs Reflected, Reinforced,
and Created in Popular Song Lyrics and Musical Content

A THESIS

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College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"

and the Degree Bachelor of Arts

In the Department of Communication

by

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Project Title: Romantic Relationships: Beliefs Reflected, Reinforced, and Created in Popular Song Lyrics and Musical Content

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Abstract

Language and music work together in popular songs to portray messages that help construct listeners' reality. As humans, we understand and interpret the world through the language and images provided for us in our symbolic universe. The ideas of theorists Kenneth Burke and Walter Fisher, which are used in this analysis, support social constructionism, a conceptual framework that notes that the people of a culture define their ideas of reality and truth by the ways in which they communicate and tell stories about their surroundings. Kenneth Burke's theories of dramatism and cluster criticism, along with basic elements of music theory and Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, form a theoretical basis for this analysis. The people of a culture share a set of beliefs about the world that are created through their language. In addition, mass media – particularly those forms that distribute popular music – help to create and reflect the ideologies, or common sets of beliefs, within a culture. Thus, popular music serves as an important artifact for examination. Because popular songs are presented through mass media, their messages reach an enormous audience. Mass mediated messages often portray specific themes. Popular music is a mass media form in which messages concerning romantic relationships abound. This study's examination of the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 provides insight into the messages about romantic relationships that are widely distributed in America. The specific messages in the lyrics and musical content of the eight songs portray realistic, unrealistic, healthy, and unhealthy accounts of how "normal" romantic relationships function. Most of the texts in the study elicit a number of general observations. Some of the observations include portrayals of gender inequality, power imbalances, codependency, a focus on physical aspects, and utopian idealism that create "normal" accounts of romantic relationships. Implications of these distributed unrealistic and unhealthy portrayals include distorted images of romantic relationships that help to form listeners' reality. Thus, beliefs about romantic relationships are reflected, reinforced, and created through popular songs.

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Romantic Relationships: Beliefs Reflected, Reinforced, and Created in Popular Song Lyrics and Musical Content

Introduction

Art is not a mirror held up to reality,
but a hammer with which to shape it.

-- Bertolt Brecht

The idea that language constructs people's reality is one that communication theorists have been examining for decades. Humans understand and derive meaning from their world through words and images present in their symbolic universe. Scholar Kenneth Burke, hailed by some as "unquestionably the most brilliant and suggestive critic now writing in America" (Simons 3), has devoted many years to the study of language and its effects on humans. Burke, a modern humanist, began examining language in the mid-1900s.

Burke has labeled humans as symbol-using animals. People use symbols, or words, to communicate with others and to describe the world around them. Jane Blankenship agrees in her article: "A central part of the 'legacy' of Kenneth Burke is his powerful treatment of language as constitutive of social reality" (128). Thus, words are symbols, not "concrete fragments of reflected reality" (Rueckert 78) that shape people's perception of reality. In fact, humans are so surrounded and shaped by sign systems and language that Burke, in his book *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, marvels at the prospect of life without symbols: "How fantastically much of our 'reality' could not exist for us, were it not for our profound and inveterate involvement in symbol systems" (48). Without some form of language, humans could not communicate and ideas would not exist. Jonathan Bignell states this idea succinctly in his book: instead of "the common-sense view that reality exists before language gives words to it, the language system we use creates our concepts of reality. We cannot think or speak about something for which there are no words in our language" (6).

While language and sign systems shape reality, they also provide ways for humans to communicate about this reality. People communicate in different languages and use different forms of nonverbal communication to enhance their ideas. However, according to Walter Fisher, one theory binds all forms of communication: the narrative paradigm. Like any other theory of human action, the narrative paradigm “seeks to account for how persons come to believe and to behave. It differs from social scientific and humanistic theories in that it projects narration not as an art, genre, or activity, but as a paradigm” (244). Essentially, the narrative paradigm regards *all* types of communication as story. Since, as Fisher believes, people are storytelling creatures, “all messages are best viewed as story, not necessarily in their form, but because they cause us to spin out their implications for the way we live *our* story” (Griffin 324). Fisher says that a believable story results when narrative coherence and narrative fidelity – concepts that will be fully explained later in this thesis – are both present in the narration.

One especially crucial point Fisher makes with his paradigm is that almost any person can determine whether a story sounds believable. “When communication is viewed as narrative,” notes Em Griffin in his textbook *A First Look at Communication Theory*, “people don’t need specialized training to figure out whether a story holds together or has the ring of truth. Anyone with a little common sense is a competent rhetorical critic” (330).

The idea that most people can recognize a believable story seems fairly basic. However, that concept has dramatic implications when one remembers that the words or symbols people use to tell stories shape perceptions of reality. Such a statement may have an impact on any particular culture, or shared set of meanings and beliefs among a group of people. According to Michael Real in his book *Mass-Mediated Culture*, “Anthropologists generally define *culture* as the systematic way of construing reality that a people acquires as a consequence of living in a group” (9). Within any given culture exist one or more ideologies. According to Bignell, “An ideology is a way of perceiving reality and society which assumes that

some ideas are self-evidently true, while other ideas are self-evidently biased or untrue" (25). In other words, an ideology is the shared mind frame of a group of people.

In his article, Walter Fisher notes that "one of the pervasive functions of language is to foster ideology" (239). The words people use to describe situations, tell stories, and otherwise communicate help mold the mind frames and shape the perceptions of a group of people. Thus, language helps form beliefs, truths, and falsities within a society. Language and words reinforce various notions concerning "right" and "wrong" ways to think, act, and live in every culture. The use of language therefore has an important influence on the ideas and beliefs of a group of people.

When applied to the culture and dominant ideology of the United States, influential language appears in the form of mass media. In all forms – television, radio, film, magazines, books, newspapers, advertising, and even the Internet – mass media offer words and images that help shape people's perceptions of reality. While numerous studies have shown that media influence people's behavior, this thesis will not concentrate on effects criterion. Rather than searching for particular effects that media can incur on people who are exposed to mediated messages, this project will make judgments on specific messages. Thus, an awareness and examination of the messages sent through mass media is a way to understand why people maintain certain beliefs about popular culture.

As Schudson (1984) said, "The power of media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare a thing to be true but in its power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear" (qtd. in Bachen and Illouz 285). Mass media in America are everywhere and inescapable. As a result, Americans willingly consume mass-mediated culture in large amounts. Says Real, "Popular culture available through mass media spills out goodies for all. Feature films, popular music, video, sports events, political movements, popular religion, science fiction, news weeklies, westerns, detective fiction – these offer sight, sound, feeling, thinking, and sharing that can be stimulating, satisfying, and rewarding" (3). And, as Real notes,

"Audiences are conditioned by what they have been exposed to" (246). In other words, people's perceptions of reality are continually being shaped and redefined – not only through their conversations with other people, but also through their contact with mass mediated messages. Again, Real states this idea precisely: "As a virtually omnipresent symbolic form, mass-mediated culture expresses and determines human descriptions of life and definitions of reality" (4).

Since media have such power to define reality, an examination of media-driven themes may be helpful in determining media's true impact on society. Real encourages media critics to look for "the dominant genres and themes in popular culture" (4), or mass-mediated culture. Marriage, various occupations, sex, violence, relationships, politics, and death are just a few topics that frequently appear in print and broadcast media. Soap operas, films, magazine articles, situation comedies, and other forms of media repeatedly portray these themes. Thus, people learn to interpret these human experiences largely through popular culture transmitted by mass media. Many people relate to and base their own behavior on the themes, or cultural models, portrayed in American mass media. Media serve as huge socializing agents in this culture.

Popular mass media repeatedly portray the theme of relationships, specifically romantic relationships. Research has shown that the symbols and practices of romance have been shaped by the language, values, and symbols portrayed in the mass media. In their article "Imagining Romance: Young People's Cultural Models of Romance and Love," Christine M. Bachen and Eva Illouz state that "As early as 1933, research uncovered a link between romantic portrayal in the mass media and audience response" (281). American society is flooded with icons of romance. According to the study conducted by Bachen and Illouz, even young people are aware of media's rich source of stories about love. The study found that mass media serve as "more frequent sources of love stories than interpersonal sources: 94 percent [of young people] said they 'often' or 'sometimes' encountered love stories on TV, 90 percent in movies, 83 percent in songs or music and 73 percent in books" (292).

When it tells stories about new or old romantic relationships, popular music serves as an important mass medium in portraying images of love to listeners. In his book *Images of American Society in Popular Music: A Guide to Reflective Teaching*, Lee B. Cooper defines popular music in this way: "Put simply, the idea that a song is popular means that it is played frequently in private homes as well as in public places – at dances, at restaurants, on radios and jukeboxes, or anywhere else people gather" (4). Popular music reaches an extremely large audience for extensive periods. For example, people turn on their radios or compact disc players as they travel in their vehicles. People listen to popular music at work, in shopping centers, while exercising, at concerts, and while relaxing. A study conducted by Judy C. Pearson, Richard L. West, and Lynn H. Turner found that "college students who monitor their recorded music exposure usually find they are exposed to music over one-half of their waking hours" (238). Although that quotation referred to college students only, people of all ages are exposed to popular music throughout much of their lives.

Literature Review

Popular music has not received much attention from communication researchers. A literature review of an Expanded Academic ASAP index search and a ComIndex search on the Internet proves that theorists and researchers have not conducted many studies of popular songs from 1990 to 1995. Literature regarding other types of music abounds, however. For example, many articles and books discuss the importance of music in social movements. In their book *Persuasion and Social Movements*, Robert E. Denton, Craig Allen Smith, and Charles J. Stewart note the use of song to inspire and motivate slaves and others who fought for civil rights. Music played a role in the farmworkers' movements, as well, according to Patrick H. Mooney and Theo J. Majka in their book *Farmers' and Farmworkers' Movements: Social*

Protest in American Agriculture. Also, James Lull discusses protest music in its many forms in his article "Popular Music and Communication: An Introduction" (16-20).

In addition, much academic research exists concerning classical music and how those pieces portray meaning and feeling. Books that date from the early 1900s to as recently as 1999 mention the potential meaning in various styles of musical works by Renaissance composers, Brahms, Beethoven, Baroque composers, Mozart, Copland, and the like. For instance, Thomas Benjamin's book *Counterpoint in the Style of J.S. Bach* discusses Baroque composer Bach's various composing techniques. Also, Julia Frances Smith's book *Aaron Copland, His Work and Contribution to American Music* examines the techniques of twentieth-century American composer Aaron Copland. Another example is Roy Howat's book *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis*, which highlights the impressionistic effects used by composer Claude Debussy in much of his work.

Scholars have written numerous articles about classical music, as well. For example, Todd Borgerding's article "Preachers, Pronunciato, and Music: Hearing Rhetoric in Renaissance Sacred Polyphony" examines printed and heard rhetoric in specific Renaissance music. Furthermore, Dillon Parmer's article "Brahms and the Poetic Motion: A Hermeneutic Aid?" discusses the use of poetic lines to interpret composer Johannes Brahms' piano pieces.

Some academics have written articles concerning such recent and popular music as songs by Elvis Presley, The Beatles, and Bruce Springsteen. For instance, Kenneth Gloag's article "All You Need Is Theory? The Beatles' 'Sgt. Pepper'" deals with analyzing The Beatles' music within a particular cultural or critical context and with the plurality and diversity inherent in The Beatles' music. Also, Robert Fink's article "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon" notes through an analysis of Elvis Presley's music that classical training can inform popular music. In addition, in Deanna D. Sellnow's article "Rhetorical Strategies of Continuity and Change in the Music of Popular Artists over Time," she examines the lyrics, musical content, and other aspects of the songs of popular music artist

Bruce Springsteen. Basic guidelines for musical analysis exist in much of the literature, as well. Of the material I examined in my literature review, Sellnow's article relates the most to my project. However, I found no studies of the top eight Billboard popular songs between 1990 and 1995, which serve as the texts in my analysis.

The fields of communication and music lack research concerning recent (1990-present) popular music and the mass-mediated portrayal of particular themes in popular song lyrics and musical content. Present research about the importance of studying popular songs is relatively new to the communication and music disciplines. Therefore, popular music still demands vigorous examination. In fact, Sellnow states, "Most rhetorical scholars concur that rhetorical analyses of music must analyze both lyrical content and musical score. Yet, relatively few have constructed or applied frameworks that allow for an integrated examination of lyrics and music" (46-47). B. Lee Cooper comments on the importance of studying music in his article "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me: Reflections on the Evolution of Popular Music and Rock Scholarship." Cooper says, "Modern music is a particularly revealing source of the human spirit" and thus warrants examination (101). He continues, "Poetic, profane, patriotic, pulsing, powerful, ponderous, and plagiaristic – music from the second half of the twentieth century merits serious investigation" (101). Thus, a need exists for this type of research in the communication and music fields.

The lyrics that form popular music deserve considerable attention, especially when one realizes the impact those lyrics may have on shaping reality for listeners. In addition, many recent popular song lyrics likely contain messages concerning romantic relationships, a theme found throughout many media forms. Finally, critics have found that popular music itself serves as a creator and mirror of American society. Liturgical musicians Kate Cuddy and Gary Daigle note the dominance of music in society: "Music plays an important role in shaping the lives of all people, young and old, especially when its language (text and musical style) help to express our deepest pain, joy, convictions, and questions" (2).

This thesis is an example of academic research. Thus, it will critically examine popular songs' claims about romantic relationships. By examining the lyrics and musical content of the eight most popular songs from 1990 to 1995, this analysis will take a narrow focus concerning mass media's influence in portraying and shaping reality.

Because the top eight songs from the first half of the 1990s emphasize lyrics and musical content that discuss romantic relationships, these songs provide an appropriate context for analyzing the portrayal of romantic relationships in popular music. The social constructionist view of society and communication, as described by scholars such as Kenneth Burke and Walter Fisher, will serve as a critical framework through which to rhetorically analyze the popular songs. Ultimately, this analysis will critically the idea that popular song lyrics and musical content deserve attention for the reality they portray about popular culture. Such an examination is of great importance to a nation driven and flooded by the mass media and popular culture.

Beliefs about romantic relationships are reflected, reinforced, and created in popular song lyrics and musical content. An examination of both the lyrics and the musical components of Billboard magazine's top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 will reveal themes relating to romantic relationships. Such themes portray societal norms or realities about romantic relationships within popular culture. Some of the taken-for-granted, common sense aspects of romantic relationships that are ideologically reinforced by these eight songs include codependency of partners, a focus on physical and sexual aspects of romantic relationships, male dominance, and female weakness and inferiority. These features should be critiqued and examined as they likely influence listeners' perceptions of reality about romantic relationship "norms." Radocy's quotation supports my thesis: "Music is reality in some form to almost everyone" (17).

Research Questions

Like most academic research, the focus of this study is narrow. It will investigate popular songs from three specific angles: the use of specific language and symbols in the lyrics, the use of certain musical components that invoke emotions in listeners, and the coupling of such lyrics and musical content with the driving mass medium of popular music. This methodology is limited and thus cannot encompass effects the songs may have on shaping ideas and behavior. However, the examination will incorporate possible influences the eight popular songs may have on American society. It will lay a foundation for examining the use of thematic language and musical components in such a widely consumed medium as popular music. This assessment of eight popular songs' lyrics and musical components will help researchers gain a better understanding of how the songs are structured as rhetorical artifacts. The examination will also show how the use of certain rhetorical and musical devices in the songs may help mold listeners' reality of the world. At the end of my analysis, I will explore the implications and the limits of this project.

This thesis will research the following questions: The first, adapted from Cooper's book, asks, "What specific images of contemporary American society cross the mind of the listener?" (86). In other words, what do the analyzed songs say about popular culture? What implications do those portrayals have when viewed through Burke's cluster criticism and Fisher's narrative paradigm theories? Then, how do the songs portray romantic relationship themes in their lyrics and in their musical content? How do the narratives in the songs portray the norms of romantic relationships? Finally, what implications does this study have on communication and music theory?

The Purpose of This Analysis

This research will attempt to describe and analyze the romantic relationship themes and content of eight popular songs. Popular music is distributed to many people through mass media and influences the ways in which people understand and view reality. Thus, consumers of mass media should be aware of the messages they receive through the lyrics and musical components of popular music. In his book, Cooper notes the importance of the ability to “recognize, define, and evaluate persistent themes and parallel idea patterns in popular music” (6).

Again, the purpose of this research is to provide a rhetorical analysis of the portrayal of romantic relationships in popular song lyrics and musical components. The intent is to raise awareness of the portrayals of romantic relationships in popular music and to address possible implications of those portrayals.

Texts

The analysis will be grounded in specific research of eight particular texts of popular songs. The texts are Billboard magazine’s top eight most popular songs from 1990 to 1995, as follows: “One Sweet Day” by Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men (on Carey’s album *Daydream*), “I’ll Make Love to You” by Boyz II Men (*II* album), “I Will Always Love You” by Whitney Houston (*The Bodyguard* album/soundtrack), “End of the Road” by Boyz II Men (*Cooleyhighharmony* album), “I Swear” by All-4-One (*All-4-One* album), “Fantasy” by Mariah Carey (*Daydream* album), “Dreamlover” by Mariah Carey (*Music Box* album), and “That’s the Way Love Goes” by Janet Jackson (*janet.* album). This list is printed in Joel Whitburn’s book *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits* (111).

Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure can often be intimidating in this type of analysis. While a plethora of analyzable texts may exist, a study must limit its numbers of texts in order to ensure a thorough examination in a limited amount of available space. In fact, Budd, Donohew, and Thorp explain that “for many content studies, the immense task of analyzing various aspects of the content in all space of all issues of all publications for the entire time period would inhibit the investigation from the outset” (16). In other words, a researcher cannot examine all the available texts or materials on his/her topic. Instead, the researcher must select certain texts that could represent the whole of his/her subject. In this project, the task of analyzing all of the popular songs ever created – or even just those from 1990 to 1995 – would be an almost impossible undertaking. In order to make this mission more manageable, I chose to analyze the lyrics of eight specific songs that were especially popular from 1990 to 1995.

Several other reasons exist for selecting the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 as the textual analysis material for this project. Every day, thousands of events across the globe could be selected and analyzed by communicators – speeches, demonstrations, business mergers, daily conversations, and the like. This paper will examine music and music lyrics because of popular music's colossal audience and because of the “realities” about romantic relationships that potentially lie within the songs. Simply stated, “Content creates images” (Cooper 5).

Other reasons for my selections follow. When I began this paper, I was faced with a seemingly unlimited number of songs from which to choose as a base for this project. For example, I had to decide on a particular genre of music. While I chose popular music, I could have also examined country western, rap, heavy metal, contemporary, or other types of music. Popular music seemed to be the most general type of music to study, a type that many people hear and are exposed to regularly.

Popular music is an important aspect of American society for a number of reasons. First, popular music can connect the people of a culture. In fact, according to John Orman, "Popular music provides the glue that holds American popular culture together" (281). Music serves as a type of language: it enhances communication and bonds those who are exposed to it. People can relate through popular music, as well, for it allows people to express deep emotions and thoughts. Music is also known to have healing or therapeutic powers. In these ways, popular music can be a very persuasive tool. Second, music is everywhere. It abounds in many forms in most societies worldwide. In America and elsewhere, music propels cultural and religious rituals and ceremonies; it accompanies professional sports events; it blasts from car radios and personal stereos; it fills shopping centers, business offices, and even elevators; and it enhances movies and commercials. People are constantly bombarded by music, including popular music. Finally, popular music reaches large amounts of people. Many people consume it both directly and indirectly. Extremely large audiences are exposed to music – particularly popular music – for extensive periods. Since music reaches so many people, connects them in a culture, and abounds in societies, it plays an important role in American culture and warrants critical examination.

When the influential powers of both the musical style and the lyrics of a song are considered, the importance of popular music in shaping listeners' views becomes obvious. In her article "Women and Country Music," Karen S. Lundy notes popular music's important role in society: "All media sources are important influences on people's ideas about social reality. Popular music is considered to be a significant socializing mechanism that both transmits and reflects norms regarding all social behavior" (213). For these reasons, awareness of music's role in society is important in this analysis of romantic relationship themes in popular songs.

One additional comment must be made concerning Americans' ability to passively consume popular music. Listeners frequently absorb popular music without reflecting on or critically examining its messages. Too often, people dismiss music – and other mass-mediated

art forms – as pure entertainment. With this frame of mind, the implications of certain mass-produced messages in any art form may be overlooked. Says Radocy, “Popular music often exemplifies music as entertainment, although it also may serve other functions. (From the standpoint of many performers and the recording industry, its major function is to make money)” (12). While popular music does intend to entertain listeners, it must also be critiqued for its content and possible impact on its audience. Considering Americans’ passive consumption of popular music, this study of the portrayal of “reality” in romantic relationships in song lyrics and musical content is needed.

I also chose to study a group of songs from Billboard’s list of popular songs. Again, I elected for this option because I thought more people would listen to or be exposed to a variety of frequently played songs from a variety of artists. Instead of concentrating on one artist’s or group’s record, I decided to bring more artist diversity to the assortment of songs I studied. This way, the mixture of Billboard songs avoids presenting groups’ or single artists’ theme topics. For example, if Whitney Houston produced a record in which all the songs happened to describe her newborn child or a past relationship, her songs might offer her own individual account of relationships. Thus, a study of Houston’s record would not offer a variety of themes to warrant a legitimate study. However, in the mix of Billboard popular songs as they exist for this project, one song by Whitney Houston is included in the group. The list also includes music by artists Mariah Carey, Boyz II Men, All-4-One, and Janet Jackson. Thus, the short sampling of songs includes a variety of single and group artists to whom Americans listen often.

The fact that the songs in this project appear on a Billboard chart also warrants consideration. An explanation of Billboard itself will ensure a justified musical sampling. Billboard magazine constantly ranks the most popular music in America. The magazine lists popular single songs and albums. Each piece of music is compared to all the other aired songs of a certain time and is ranked in popularity based on the sales it generates and the air time it receives. Billboard creates Top 10, Top 20, Top 40, and Top 100 lists periodically, and all the

lists rank songs and albums in the same manner. According to Joel Whitburn, Billboard magazines' Hot 100 chart "made its debut on August 4, 1958, and it has long been regarded as the definitive weekly ranking of America's most popular songs in sales and radio play" (12). In his article "Top 40 Radio: A fragment of the imagination," Ken Barnes says that the basic Top 40 principle is to "play the hits over and over" (12). The Top 40 approach, which Billboard magazine now uses, was actually devised by Storz in 1953. Storz "played the hits of the day in rotations designated to give listeners a very good chance of hearing" certain songs repeatedly throughout the day (Barnes 11). The Top 40 approach is still used at many radio stations today; it has become an efficient and audience-attracting method of playing music on the radio. Finally, according to Keith Caulfield, a chart assistant at Billboard magazine, on the "Ask Billboard" website, "Billboard's top-selling albums and singles charts are compiled from the national sample of retail store, mass merchant, and Internet sales reports collected and compiled by soundscan, which monitors actual over-the-counter sales" (1999).

I decided to examine only eight songs for this analysis. I reasoned that five songs might be too few but fifteen songs would undoubtedly be too many to analyze for this project. Since I faced time and space constraints, I decided that eight is a justifiable number of songs in a sampling such as this one.

A final reason for my selections focuses on my choice of the 1990 to 1995 time frame. First, I chose a five-year period's worth of Billboard top songs in order to examine a broad range of very popular, successful, and well-known songs. The top songs in one year might not be as well-known or remembered as songs that have been very popular for five years. Second, I chose the most recent years for which Billboard published five years' worth of top songs. I wanted to examine the most pertinent music to today's culture, and the top hits for 1995 to 2000 were not yet available when I made my decision.

All of these factors influenced my decision to analyze the lyrics of Billboard's top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 for their portrayals of romantic relationships. Interestingly, every song

in the analysis deals directly with romantic relationships. Contemporary song lyrics and music can affect the way people view the world and reality. In addition, popular songs are distributed to millions of people through the mass media. For these reasons, the lyrics and musical components of Billboard's top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 demand careful attention.

Another objective of my selection of the particular Billboard songs was to use these texts as representations of the lyrics in modern popular songs. This is a typical research method in case studies. Budd, Donohew, and Thorp note that "in studies involving sampling, we make observations of a limited number of individuals, objects, or events so that we can make inferences about the larger number from which we have drawn the sample" (16). By conducting a lyrical and musical analysis of the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995, inferences about the ways in which romantic relationships are portrayed and are understood through modern popular songs can be made. Although this analysis cannot assume that every contemporary popular song exhibits exactly the same ideas toward romantic relationships, it can give an impression of other possible popular songs' lyrical and musical content. Drawing these types of inferences is vital to examining the idea that Americans believe certain concepts about romantic relationships largely because of the portrayal of those relationships in the mass media – particularly in popular music.

Finally, Budd, Donohew, and Thorp note that "plentiful, simple text is easier to draw conclusions from than is meager, complicated text" (49). The texts of the lyrics in this analysis' songs are ample and relatively understandable and comprehensible. For these reasons, the song lyrics are appropriate sample texts.

Preview

Overall, this paper will prepare and then present a lyrical and musical analysis of eight recent popular songs. The first section will address Kenneth Burke's ideas of dramatism and

cluster criticism, along with Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm theory, to show the significance of language in society and to establish a theoretical basis on which to examine the popular song lyrics. The section continues by discussing the impact of language in terms of its role in establishing culture, ideology, and myth among a group of people. Mass media's influence will then be noted, as it pertains to the wide distribution of popular songs and their messages.

Next, the actual lyrical and musical analysis of Billboard's top eight popular songs from 1990 to 1995 will occur. The analysis will incorporate the theoretical material explained above and will point to the implications of the determined data. A commentary regarding potential meanings of the analyzed material will follow the lyrical and musical analyses of the popular songs. The section will show that beliefs about romantic relationships are reflected, reinforced, and created through popular song lyrics and musical content.

The paper's conclusion will summarize the major arguments, point to the limitations of the project, and suggest potential future study areas related to the topic. It will ensure that the research questions presented in the introduction have been answered in the body of the thesis.

The Social Constructionist View of Society and Communication

Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world,
but on it depends the fact that man has a world at all.

-- H-G. Gadamer, in Walter Fisher's article
"The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," p. 242

To be viable, this study must use some theoretical concepts to establish a foundation for the research analysis. This thesis will analyze the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 for their portrayals of romantic relationships. The following section will further explain Kenneth Burke's ideas of dramatism and cluster criticism and the concepts in Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm. Academic material by scholars such as Burke and Fisher serves as a device that establishes a theoretical framework or lens through which to view the popular songs. An examination of the lyrics and musical content with the ideas of Burke and Fisher in mind can highlight recurrent images and themes.

Kenneth Burke's Dramatism and Cluster Criticism

Consideration of the connection between language and humans' perceptions of reality is not complete without acknowledging the significant contributions of scholar Kenneth Burke. Burke, a modern humanist who lived from 1897 to 1993, has played an important role in linguistic academia (Rueckert 109). Burke has tackled many different academic ideas and has brought new understanding to people's views of language. In *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*, Wayne Booth is quoted as saying, "What Burke has done better than anyone else is to find a way to connect literature with life without reducing either" (4).

A condensed version of Burke's concept of dramatism follows: First, "Dramatism is the label Burke gave to the study of human motivation through terms derived from the study of drama" (Foss 1989, 455). Two basic assumptions underlie the theory, but the one that most

pertains to this analysis is the idea that language use constitutes action, not motion. "Action corresponds to the symbolic or neurological aspect of the human being, which Burke defined as the ability of an organism to acquire language or a symbol system" (Foss 1989, 455-456).

Burke believes that humans are symbol-using creatures. One form of symbols used by humans is words or language. The words and language people use to describe the world around them help to shape their ideas of reality. People become united through their shared knowledge base called language and therefore find that words create a sense of shared meaning for a group of people. The meanings of symbols, or words, are agreed upon by a group of people and help to form a language. For the purposes of this section, a very broad, general look at all human beings is necessary. In other words, the idea that people are symbol users is not specific to any particular culture or language.

The implication of humans as symbol-using beings is that, according to Burke, "overwhelmingly much of our 'reality' has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems" (Burke 5). Therefore, humans interpret the world through the symbols, words, and language they use to create it. Like Burke, theorist Ferdinand de Saussure thought that "our perception and understanding of reality is constructed by the words and other signs which we use in a social context" (Bignell 6). Saussure proposed that signs and symbols shape human perceptions rather than "reflecting a reality which was already out there" (Bignell 6). Words and language become tools with which people communicate ideas and thoughts. Symbols, or words, form the content of verbal and written communication.

Finally, although Burke acknowledges the importance of each person's experience and how that affects everyone's views of reality, he believes that the power of words overrides the power of experience. He says, in fact, that "However important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced firsthand, the whole overall 'picture' is but a construct of our symbol systems" (Burke 5).

In essence, Burke claims that humans are creatures that view reality through a highly developed symbol system called language (Burke 22). In his textbook, Stephen E. Lucas summarizes Burke's – and others' – view about the power of language: "Contrary to popular belief, language does not mirror reality. It does not simply describe the world as it is. Instead, language helps create our sense of reality by giving meaning to events. Language is not neutral" (265). Thus, the way romantic relationships are portrayed through popular song lyrics and musical components can have a notable effect on how listeners understand those relationships.

Besides dramatism, the most relevant of Burke's specific methods of theory to this research is the approach of rhetorical criticism called cluster criticism. This approach will be developed and more thoroughly explained in the following paragraphs.

First, Sonja Foss notes the importance and purpose of rhetorical criticism in the second edition of her book *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*. Rhetorical criticism, says Foss, is "the process of systematically investigating and explaining symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes" (6-7). Also, Foss defines rhetoric itself as "the action humans perform when they use symbols for the purpose of communicating with one another" (4). Put simply, people can use rhetorical criticism to uncover meanings in the world and in their lives. Thus, Burke's approach of cluster criticism helps humans determine meanings and decipher messages.

Cluster criticism is a method of rhetorical criticism developed by Burke "to help the critic discover a rhetor's worldview" (Foss 63). Using cluster criticism, "the meanings that key symbols have for the rhetor are discovered by charting the symbols that cluster around those key symbols in the rhetorical artifact" (Foss 63-64). The central idea of cluster criticism is to group associated words within a text (Foss 64). By doing so, a critic can determine what moods or attitudes a rhetor presents – either consciously or unconsciously – within his/her text. An examination of the interrelationships between clustered terms in popular song lyrics, then, could

result in an insightful account of the moods and attitudes that songwriters convey through their song lyrics. These moods and attitudes, combined with the lyrics and musical content, provides accounts of “reality” about romantic relationships and other themes that are distributed to many people via mass media. Thus, a look at key and cluster terms in Billboard’s top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 may show that beliefs are reflected, reinforced, and created in popular songs.

Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm

Communication theorist Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm is the final aspect of the theoretical foundation for the lyrical analysis. Fisher is a Communication Arts and Sciences professor at the University of Southern California (Griffin 322). His ideas that humans are storytellers and that narratives shape reality help to form an extended base of knowledge from which to examine the lyrics of Billboard magazine’s top eight songs from 1990 to 1995.

Fisher’s narrative paradigm is a communication theory that suggests a method for humans of making sense or meaning of the world that they inhabit. Researchers John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields describe the narrative paradigm’s “utility and ability to explain communication in various situations” (92). Thus, the theory is a useful rhetorical tool. In these ways, Fisher’s narrative paradigm provides a solid basis through which song lyrics can be examined.

Fisher’s ideas concur with Burke’s thinking about symbols and dramatism. Thus, Fisher believes that using symbols, or words, to tell stories paints pictures that portray reality in certain ways. Stories play a large role in shaping cultures and belief systems, according to Fisher. Since musicians often tell stories in their song lyrics and musical material, Fisher’s ideas are valid ways to examine how the lyrics and musical aspects of the eight popular songs portray romantic relationships.

An important aspect of Fisher's narrative paradigm concerns who is qualified to assess the quality of communication or decide whether a story sounds believable. The theory claims that, by indirectly recognizing some basic elements in a given story, almost every person can determine a message's quality. "The narrative paradigm maintains that, armed with a little bit of common sense, almost any of us can spot a good story" (Griffin 326).

Fisher says that a believable or rational story results when listeners sense both narrative coherence and narrative fidelity in the message. Narrative coherence has to do with how probable the story appears to the hearer. Narrative coherence also deals with the logical flow, structural integrity, and internal consistency of a story. Griffin notes the following questions that a listener might unknowingly or unconsciously consider to determine whether a story has narrative coherence: "Does the narrative 'hang together'? Do the people and events it portrays seem to be of one piece? Are they part of an organic whole? Do the characters act consistently?" (327). Narrative fidelity, on the other hand, concerns whether a listener can relate to the story. "Narrative fidelity is the quality of a story that causes the words to strike a responsive chord in the life of the listener. A story has fidelity when it rings true with the hearers' experiences, squares with the stories they might tell about themselves" (Griffin 328). Lull says, "A listener may relate to music directly by experiencing it in a very personal way" (141). Griffin concludes by noting, "A story has fidelity when it provides a logic of good reasons to guide our future actions" (328).

Unlike narrative coherence, narrative fidelity appeals to listeners on a very individualized basis. If a person can relate to a story – through popular music lyrics or otherwise – by relying on his/her past experiences, that story will likely have narrative fidelity according to that person. Thus, measuring a text's overall narrative fidelity may be difficult. Determining a story's overall narrative fidelity would be most possible if that story dealt with issues or events experienced by an entire culture or group of people. For instance, a popular song concerning the Revolutionary War of the late 1700s might strike a chord with Americans, who received freedom from England

as a result of that war. However, listeners will bring their own individual experiences to unconsciously judge the narrative fidelity of a story in any case. In relating this concept to this project, although many members of the American society can relate to romantic relationships, each individual person has had different experiences with those relationships. Thus, the overall narrative fidelity of the top eight Billboard popular songs will not be considered in this analysis. According to Burke, the power of the symbols, words, and language of a story outweigh the bearing of people's experiences in determining a story's level of truth or falsity. In any case, the eight songs in this analysis will be examined based on their narrative coherence, or logical structure, but not on their narrative fidelity.

Walter Fisher believes, then, that people do not need specialized training to be competent rhetorical critics of daily conversations. While humans need no teaching to identify and be moved by stories, they do need training to decipher the reasons why some stories work and others do not. These seem like fairly basic ideas. However, when one remembers all of the verbal and written communication to which people are exposed every day – from family, friends, and especially print and broadcast media – those concepts have dramatic implications. Americans are bombarded daily with stories about every imaginable topic – children, families, jobs, the environment, health, the economy, crime, violence, and even romantic relationships. According to Fisher's paradigm, the stories told and heard mold people's ideas of reality. People who are unaware of Fisher's ideas may be unable to pinpoint flaws in certain stories or arguments they encounter. This could lead people to create false notions of reality about some topics, including romantic relationships. In her book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Deborah Tannen writes, "The stories we hear and tell in conversation shape our views. Through hearing people tell what happened to others, we form assumptions about the right way to behave" (176).

In sum, people are exposed to stories every day that affect how they view life and the world around them. One source of storytelling is popular music. In this way, anyone with a bit

of common sense can interpret popular song lyrics as stories and use those narratives to determine reality in regard to romantic relationships. However, people unaware of Fisher's arguments may not identify the flaws in certain stories. Potential flaws include stories that support stereotypical images or those that reinforce gender-biased notions. If a story in a popular song includes both narrative coherence and narrative fidelity, then that song has the potential to influence listeners' perceptions of what romantic relationships should and should not encompass. Therefore, examining Billboard's top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 through Fisher's conceptual framework may give insight into the way that many Americans think about romantic relationships.

Culture, Ideology, and Myth

Kenneth Burke and Walter Fisher have commented on the idea that language shapes reality. Since language is a set of understood symbols or words, the denotative meanings of those words must be recognized by a group of people, or a culture. When a mass of people uses the same words to communicate, common understandings are formed that help shape the group. These common understandings are the foundations on which a culture or society's beliefs and thoughts are built. In essence, the belief systems of any particular culture are formed through that culture's language and communication.

Language shapes people's reality, and it also socializes them, says Burke. While Burke claims that humans are symbol-using creatures, Michael Real reminds us that humans are also social animals (257-258). Duncan's book *Symbols in Society* also "assumes that how we communicate determines how we socialize" (43). He continues his thoughts about communication in society: "When people cannot communicate, they cannot relate" (130). Brock, Chesebro, and Scott remark that humans are "bodies that learn language" (193). Burke sounds more humanistic when he states this idea in his own book: "The human animal, as we

know it, emerges into personality by first mastering whatever tribal speech happens to be its particular symbolic environment" (53). In other words, Burke believes that a person can become a real person, with desires and a personality, only when that person has learned the language of his/her society or culture. Symbols, words, and language play a large role in socializing people.

Common symbols, such as words and language, form common meanings within a group of people. Language helps to shape the ideas of a society and culture. In his article "A Sociological Model of Social Interaction as Determined by Communication," Hugh Dalziel Duncan says, "How we communicate determines how we relate as human beings" (357). When humans relate, they band together to form a society. "Communication joins all people," according to Denton, Smith, and Stewart (96). Many scholars and researchers have described language as a way of creating culture. Gender linguist Deborah Tannen notes that "Through language, our images and attitudes are buttressed and shaped" into a massive, often unquestioned, societal meaning and reality (243). Leading sociology theorist Talcott Parsons agrees with Tannen and takes her ideas to another level. "Communication is the action process which is the source and the bearer of cultural creation and maintenance," he says (qtd. in Duncan 14).

Philosopher Michael Foucault also finds a relationship between language and meaning in society. Foucault notes that "Communication is the primary process through which social reality is created because in communication 'something is formed'" (qtd. in Wood 12). Reality, a sense of shared ideas, and collective meaning are all formed through communication.

Thus, language helps to create and mold culture. Athena du Pre notes that "Culture refers to a set of beliefs, rules, and practices that are shared by a group of people. Cultural assumptions suggest how members should behave, what roles they are expected to play, and how various events and actions should be interpreted" (158). A person's culture assists him/her in defining ideas such as success, love, and happiness. Researchers must remember that,

within a culture, different people's sex, age, social class, race, family composition, and other individual factors will influence their ideas of concepts such as power, romantic relationships, wealth, and love (Bachen & Illouz 296). However, this paper will concentrate on an overall view that portrays culture as an influential teaching agent in every person's life.

Because of the impact of a culture on its people's lives, culture should be continually examined. Analyzing an individual's beliefs must eventually lead to an assessment of the beliefs of his/her particular culture, since a culture can have a profound effect on its inhabitants. In what ways can one study a culture? Michael Real notes that culture can be examined "in the form of widespread symbols, rhythms, beliefs, and practices available through media in the form of television, radio, records, film, books, periodicals, and other means of communication that transmit in a mass manner from a single source to many anonymous receivers" (8). Thus, probing into a people's beliefs can be accomplished through a study of that culture's popular music.

While a culture's rituals and belief systems help to join its people together and enhance patriotism, its beliefs, ideas, and values may eventually become unquestioned. The beliefs of a society are always subject to change. For example, 200 years ago, American society proclaimed that black people were inferior to white people and that women were weaker than and inferior to men. Today, those beliefs are less dominant in American culture. Some ideas in a culture's dominant ideology, or current system of beliefs, can become problematic because they eventually seem natural, commonsense, and self-evident. When harmful practices or ideas go unquestioned because they are a part of the dominant ideology and seem common sense and traditional, problems may occur. For instance, two centuries ago when plantation owners used slaves, few people questioned or challenged those actions for many years. During that time, many humans treated black people inhumanely, like chattel. Finally, people began to question and challenge the dominant ideology, and the situation eventually changed. The same concept can be applied to some current cultural practices, including capital punishment, closed-

mindedness toward homosexuality, and even the repeated portrayal of partners in romantic relationships in music.

Fisher's narrative paradigm theory suggests that narrative, or stories, can reinforce ideology. Stories – especially those that are continuously told – oftentimes support a culture's dominant beliefs about many facets of life in that society. Narratives about the economy and government, history, leisure activities, relationship “norms,” and the religion of a group of people in a culture may contain biases, stereotypical ideas, or even incorrect information. If the people in a culture tell such stories and the narratives are never challenged or questioned because they include both narrative coherence and narrative fidelity to uninformed listeners, then those stories may reinforce a culture's ideology.

Burke's theory of dramatism also works to support a society's status quo or dominant ideology. Through dramatism, humans use symbols as words to communicate via language. People then use the language to tell stories or narratives, relating again to Fisher's theory. Sometimes, narratives challenge the ideas of the dominant ideology. Rather than reflecting on those challenges and changing a society's unwritten rules to promote more equality or better treatment of all people, the society oftentimes remains stagnant or stubborn. This refusal to change perpetuates the society's status quo or dominant ideology.

The French critic Roland Barthes takes these concepts a bit further by introducing the idea of cultural myths. According to Barthes, myths are “ways of thinking about people, products, places, or ideas which are structured to send particular messages to the reader or viewer of the text” (Bignell 16). Myth makes particular social meanings acceptable as the common sense truth about the world and can therefore be dangerous. Barthes continues, “The function of myth is to make particular ideas seem natural. If these ideas seem natural, they will not be resisted or fought against” (Bignell 24). Myth tends to promote one way of thinking. Bignell says that an analysis of myth reveals its “selectiveness and distortion” (25).

Myth may play a role in American cultural attitudes toward ideas of romantic relationships. An awareness of the existence and power of cultural myths – and of the dominant ideology patterns in Fisher's narrative paradigm and Burke's dramatism – can add to this research analysis of popular songs and their portrayals of romantic relationships.

The Influence of Mass Media

To analyze the eight popular song lyrics, this paper must discuss why mass media – as sources of popular music – should be examined. When applied to the culture and dominant ideology of the United States, influential language reaches people through mass media. In all its forms – television, radio, film, magazines, books, newspapers, advertising, even the Internet – mass media offer words and images that help shape Americans' perceptions of reality. Overall, mass media serve as important cultural creators and mirrors.

First, the terms media and mass communication are often used interchangeably, according to Michael Real (10). In describing mass communication, Real says it is "communication that emanates from a single individual or organization source through electronic or mechanical coding and multiplication of the message to a relatively large, heterogeneous, anonymous audience with only limited and indirect means of feedback" (10).

American culture can be termed mass-mediated culture because of its dependence on media. In his article "The School and Music in Adolescent Socialization," Keith Roe says that "After the family, the two major agents of socialization in modern societies are the school and the mass media" (212). Americans rely on media for news and entertainment purposes. In addition, Real says that mass-mediated culture is also called popular culture (9). "All culture when transmitted by mass media becomes in effect popular culture," he says (14). These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

Mass-mediated culture is significant because it is widespread and is consumed in large amounts. Media exist in numerous forms, and the messages sent to people help shape their views and ideas. "Media creations populate every waking moment" of people's lives (Real 245). Whether Americans watch music videos on television, listen to the radio, go to dance parties, attend sports events, or participate in political or social movements, they are constantly surrounded by mass-mediated culture. Thus, Americans consume mass-mediated culture every day and are unlikely to question, challenge, or wonder about the implications of their mass media-driven society.

American media tend to focus on a few topics. Love and romantic relationships are themes on which media concentrate repeatedly. In fact, researchers Bachen and Illouz have found that "Young people are aware that mass media constitute a rich source of stories about love" (292). They continue by noting that mass media serve as "more frequent sources of love stories than interpersonal sources: 94 percent [of those studied] said they 'often' or 'sometimes' encountered love stories on TV, 90 percent in movies, 83 percent in songs or music and 73 percent in books" (292). These examples illustrate the incredible influence and power that media messages – particularly words, stories, and songs that describe romantic relationships – have on a culture.

Finally, Real notes that precise media effects may be difficult to measure. He says they may be "complex or subtle" (245). However, he notes that "to deny media influence in general is to bury one's head in the sand" (245). Although this project considers the portrayal of mediated messages, it will not attempt to show or find the messages' effects on society. Rather, this research analysis will examine and critique portrayals of romantic relationships found in popular songs. This paper will then make general statements concerning possible broad-ranging implications that the songs' portrayals may have on American society in general.

An Analysis: The Top Eight Billboard Songs from 1990 to 1995

Songs are brief messages.

-- Denton, Smith, and Stewart, *Persuasion and
Social Movements*, p. 139

The lyrics and musical content of 1990-1995's top eight Billboard songs will serve as texts to examine the portrayal of romantic relationships in those eight popular songs. The eight texts deal specifically with romantic relationships. A number of themes emerge in the songs about love, and these themes will be examined later in this section. The lyrics and musical content of the songs will serve as the data used in this analysis. A rhetorical critic like Kenneth Burke "is concerned with *all* language instruments – with poems, plays, novels and written language as well as with spoken language," (Rueckert 300), including popular songs. The information derived from this examination will enable inferences and conclusions about the validity of the explanations for the impact of popular songs offered in this analysis. A look at the eight songs' lyrics and musical content using Burke's concepts of dramatism and cluster criticism, along with Fisher's narrative paradigm theory and with music theory, will show that beliefs about romantic relationships are reflected, reinforced, and created through these popular songs.

One of Burke's methods of rhetorical criticism, cluster criticism, in which clusters of terms serve as units of analysis, involves a four-step process: (1) formulating a research question and selecting an artifact; (2) selecting a unit of analysis; (3) analyzing the artifact; and (4) writing the critical essay (Foss 1996, 64). The analysis stage includes these three steps: (1) identification of key terms in the rhetorical artifact; (2) charting of terms that cluster around the key terms; and (3) discovery of patterns in the clusters around the key terms to determine meanings of the key terms for the rhetor (Foss 1996, 65). Once again, using cluster criticism involves examining implicit connections between the terms in a text that recommend the

authors' attitudes and beliefs about reality to their audience. I attempted to follow these steps in this project.

A musical analysis will follow the cluster criticism, and the musical examination will incorporate a study of the songs' narratives, as well. While the lyrics and music of the songs will be studied separately at first, they will be combined afterward in an analysis that will present the songs' potential impact on listeners. The final rhetorical analysis will also discuss the consumption of popular music. The analyses will present possible implications or consequences of the mass distribution of the eight songs.

The Cluster Criticism

Billboard magazine ranked the following single songs as the eight most popular hits from 1990 to 1995: "One Sweet Day" by Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men (on Carey's album *Daydream*), "I'll Make Love to You" by Boyz II Men (*//* album), "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston (*The Bodyguard* album/soundtrack), "End of the Road" by Boyz II Men (*Cooleyhighharmony* album), "I Swear" by All-4-One (*All-4-One* album), "Fantasy" by Mariah Carey (*Daydream* album), "Dreamlover" by Mariah Carey (*Music Box* album), and "That's the Way Love Goes" by Janet Jackson (*janet.* album). This list is printed in Joel Whitburn's book *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits* (111).

Although several aspects of language could be examined in the texts of the songs, this analysis focuses on the use of cluster criticism and key symbols. Meanings in the texts can be discovered by "charting the symbols that cluster around those key symbols in the rhetorical artifact" (Foss 1996, 64). My task, as a critic, then, is to note "what subjects cluster about other subjects" in the song lyrics (Foss 1996, 64).

The first step in analyzing a text using Burke's cluster criticism is identifying the key terms that exist. According to Foss, "Significance of terms is determined on the basis of

frequency or intensity" (1995, 65). In other words, if a term frequently appears in a song or seems to convey an extreme degree of feeling, it can be considered a key term. Once the key terms have been identified, clusters around those key symbols must be noted. Finally, after the key terms and clusters are identified, patterns in the clusters are found. "At this step of the process," says Foss, "the critic attempts to find patterns in the associations or linkages discovered in the previous charting of the clusters as a way of charting the worldview the rhetor has constructed" (1996, 66).

For example, in their song "One Sweet Day," Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men discuss a relationship that has ended because the lover has died and has supposedly gone to heaven. The song deals with loving regrets; its first lyric is "Sorry." "Sorry" is thus a key term in this piece because it suggests an intense emotion that the singer wants to express. Twice, the lyrics of the song note, "Sorry I never told you / All I wanted to say." The mourning lover obviously regrets that she/he failed to do and say some things with her/his significant other. Other key terms in the piece are "never" and "always"; "never" appears four times in the song and "always" appears three times. The words are opposites and seem to balance the singer's feelings of regret for his/her loss and hope for possibly meeting with his/her lover again in heaven. "Never" and "always" appear in these instances: "Sorry I *never* told you / All I wanted to say; *Never* had I imagined / living without your smile; Darling, I *never* showed you / Assumed you'd *always* be there / I took your presence for granted / But I *always* cared; Although the sun will *never* shine the same / I'll *always* look to a brighter day / Lord I know when you lay me down to sleep / You will *always* listen as I pray." Perhaps the singer tells this story in an effort to encourage listeners to not take for granted their loved ones. No one lives forever, so we must make the most of the short time we have with each other on earth. The song's refrain, which is sung four times, acknowledges the singer's hopefulness of meeting again: "And I know you're shining down on me from Heaven / Like so many friends we've lost along the way / And I know eventually we'll be together / One sweet day." In addition, some religious and Christian

undertones are apparent in the lyrics of "One Sweet Day." Heaven is mentioned in the refrain, and the singer also speaks of the "Lord" and praying. Such religious implications may influence a listener just as "Sorry," "never," and "always" could. For example, the Christian undertones reinforce ideas of an afterlife. Overall, though, the song seems to be based on the caring and sharing that the lovers had. The song lyrics relay an optimistic view of romantic relationships. This song reinforces ideas of missing deceased loved ones and seems to be a rather healthy portrayal of a suddenly-disrupted romantic relationship. At any rate, the lonely romantic partner in this popular song misses the deceased partner but hopes to be reunited some day.

Two songs, "I Will Always Love You" and "End of the Road," relate stories of ending romantic relationships. In "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston, the female singer feels sorry for herself as she leaves the side of her lover. The romantic partners are separating, but the singer feels like a burden on the relationship. In fact, the singer focuses on the word "you." The performer is obviously more concerned about her partner's well-being than about her own. The words "you" and "your" appear 17 times throughout the song, making them key terms in "I Will Always Love You." The singer seems quite dependent and almost too caring as she concentrates on her ex-lover's feelings and well-being and not on her own happiness. These lyrics describe this point: "If I should stay / I would only be in *your* way / So I'll go but I know / I'll think of *you* every step of the way / I will always love *you*; We both know I'm not what *you* / *You* need." The singer seems oppressed as she sorrowfully continues with the song: "I hope life treats *you* kind / And I hope *you* have all you dreamed of / And I wish *you* joy and happiness / But above all this, I wish *you* love." The performer had a relationship filled with good and bad aspects with her lover. However, the singer is humbly leaving the relationship because she feels that she does not meet her partner's standards or needs. Their relationship came to a painful halt for the singer, who is hurting. Houston's song reinforces ideas of dependence, since the singer appears helpless without her ex-lover. Forms of dependence perpetuate ideas of dominance and inferiority in society by creating images of "needing" a romantic partner.

However, the singer must learn to let go of the relationship, and to do so she needs to focus on her own sanity. This song's lyrics offer a broken-hearted and pessimistic look at romantic relationships.

Boyz II Men's "End of the Road" portrays an ending relationship in a different light. In this song, the male singer tries to persuade the female lover to stay in the relationship. The male cries hurtfully for his lover to return, for he is lonely for her: "(*Lonely*) Yes baby my heart is *lonely* / (*Lonely*) My heart hurts baby / (*Lonely*) Yes I feel pain too / Baby please." "Lonely" thus becomes one of the many key terms in this song. Another key symbol in "End of the Road" is "belong," which casts light on possible power and dependency issues in the relationship. The word "belong" appears six times during the song in the forms of "We *belong* together" and "You *belong* to me, I *belong* to you." The belongingness described in these lyrics and in the phrase "You'll be mine forever baby, you just see" display a feeling of the singer's ownership of his lover, and vice-versa. Such feelings of ownership may hint toward a relationship based on co-dependency. According to his article "Dysfunctional Civilization," Al Gore says that the term co-dependency "describes the reliance on another for validation and positive feelings about oneself" (528). Other lyrics that portray the partners as somewhat co-dependent, or unable to function independently, follow: "When I can't sleep at night without holding you tight / Girl, each time I try I just break down and cry," and later, in the refrain: "Although we've come to the End of the Road / Still I can't let you go / It's unnatural, you belong to me, I belong to you." The power and dependency issues in this relationship reinforce ideas in the American dominant ideology of dominating men, submissive women, and fear of being alone. "Forever" is another key word in the piece; it is sung three times. Each time the word appears, it highlights the singer's wish for an unending, everlasting relationship with his lover, as these lyrics show: "You'll be mine *forever* baby, you just see; Said we'd be *forever*; and *Forever*, you and I."

Two other key terms in the song, "heart," which is sung four times, and "love" or "loved," which appear seven times, work together in this painful love song to attempt to persuade the

lover to return to the relationship. Some “heart” and “love” lyrics include the following: “Why do you play with my *heart* / Why do you play with my mind?; How could you *love* me and leave me / And never say good-bye?; and Can you *love* me again like you *loved* me before?” The word “you,” which appears 36 times in some form throughout the piece, serves as the song’s last key term. While the word “you” was used to represent abundant caring for the ex-partner’s well-being in “I Will Always Love You,” it takes on a different meaning in “End of the Road.” Indeed, “you” functions in this song mainly to cast blame on the partner and to exhibit the singer’s dominating characteristics. For example, the singer blames his troubled relationship on his partner, who supposedly cheated on him and broke a promise: “Why do *you* play with my heart / Why do *you* play with my mind?; Girl I’m here for *you* / All those times of night when *you* just hurt me; I’m not out to go out and cheat on *you* all night.” The singer also shows his dominance in the relationship using the word “you” in these lyrics: “We belong together / And *you* know that I’m right.” He also tries to tell his partner how she feels, thus exhibiting dominating characteristics: “Girl, I know *you* really love me / *You* just don’t realize / *You’ve* never been there before / It’s only *your* first time.” Apparently, the lovers have reached the “end of the road” in their relationship. The man is obviously upset, and he wants them to work out their problems and continue the relationship: “Can you love me again like you loved me before / This time I want you to love me much more.” The male also tries to lure the female with sexual desires: “This time instead just come to my bed / And baby just don’t let me, don’t let me down / And baby just don’t let me go.” Now, the man must wait for the woman to respond.

The partners’ relationship in “End of the Road,” is surely not built on trust and fidelity. The woman cheated on the man, and the man wants to continue their relationship. Perhaps their relationship is based on physical pleasures; after all, the male does try to seduce the female back with references to sex: “This time instead just come to my bed.” Such portrayals of romantic relationships based on sexual aspects reinforce the incorrect idea that sex is the most important aspect of a “healthy” relationship. However, other actions and behavior – including

open and honest communication, mutual trust and respect, and shared goals and values – are also needed to build strong, healthy romantic relationships.

The song by All-4-One, “I Swear,” features a male who tries to persuade his love interest to start a relationship. The male singer offers much assurance that he will treat his lover well. The words “I swear” serve as the main key terms of this song. Not including the title, “I swear” is sung 15 times throughout the piece. Mostly, “I swear” serves as a different way of saying “I promise,” as in these lyrics: “*I swear by the moon and the stars in the sky / I’ll be there / I swear like a shadow that’s by your side / I’ll be there.*”

Other lyrics that show the singer’s confidence in a good future relationship include these: “You can be sure I know my heart / ‘Coz I’ll stand beside you through the years / You’ll only cry those happy tears / And though I make mistakes / I’ll never break your heart.” He continues with more promises: “I’ll give you everything I can / I’ll build your dreams with these two hands / We’ll hang some memories on the walls / And when just the two of us are there / You won’t have to ask if I still care / ‘Coz as the time turns the page, my love won’t age at all.” Those lyrics also hint toward the singer’s desire to share a life together with his love interest. The song title “I Swear” and the refrain lyrics symbolize the singer’s thoughts of marriage, even though he has not yet entered a relationship. The marriage ceremony-like lyrics are as follows: “And I swear by the moon and the stars in the sky / I’ll be there / I swear like a shadow that’s by your side / I’ll be there / For better or worse, till death do us part / I’ll love you with every beat of my heart / And I swear.” The singer never receives a response from his imagined lover, and he continues to wish and hope that she/he will come to him.

The male singer professes his love, fidelity, and kind soul to his love interest. He wishes for a relationship in which he and his lover would stand by each other’s side and love each other forever. All-4-One’s song is an example of an ideal or perfect – but not necessarily realistic – romantic relationship. “I Swear” gives a non-existent and almost overly ideal account of a romantic relationship. The male singer here hopes for a perfect romantic relationship built on

trust, faith, and love. Such images reinforce ideas of “perfect” or unrealistic romantic relationships as “normal.” These portrayals may give listeners incorrect ideas about romantic relationships.

The lyrics of four of the eight popular songs in this analysis concentrate on physical pleasures involved in romantic relationships. “I’ll Make Love to You” by Boyz II Men, “That’s the Way Love Goes” by Janet Jackson, and “Dreamlover” and “Fantasy,” both by Mariah Carey, portray images of romantic partners whose sole interests are to physically satisfy or be satisfied in their relationships. Again, such images likely reinforce the idea that sexual aspects are the most important elements of a romantic relationship.

For instance, the lyrics to Boyz II Men’s “I’ll Make Love to You” tell the story of the male singer, who wants a particular girl to join him in bed. The words “night” and “tonight” together appear eight times throughout the song, making them key terms. The upcoming evening seems to be an important time for the couple in the song; they apparently plan to have sex then. For instance, “For *tonight* is just your *night* / We’re gonna celebrate, all thru the *night*; Girl are you ready, it’s gonna be a long *night*.” Other key terms in the piece are “wish” and “ask,” which serve similar purposes in the song. “Wish” is mentioned three times in the piece as the singer urges his partner to “Close your eyes, make a *wish*; Girl your *wish* is my command; Just make a *wish* on your night” as they prepare for their evening together. “Ask” also appears three times in the song as the male partner claims that he will do whatever his lover wants: “I’ll do anything, girl you need only *ask*; Girl whatever you *ask* me you know I’ll do.” Key terms such as *ask* and *wish* indicate that the sexual aspects of romantic relationships involve commands and demands when such a portrayal is not necessarily true.

The singer also shows some dominance and tends to tell his partner what to do (“Close your eyes, make a wish / And blow out the candlelight / Pour the wine, light the fire / Throw your clothes on the floor”), but he also contradicts himself and says, “I submit to your demands.” This particular portrayal shows a dominance in the relationship that is held in alteration by the

male partner and the female partner. While such an image indicates more equality between the romantic partners, any dominance in the relationship may be unhealthy as it leads to struggles with power and inferiority that are dominant in America. Throughout the song, especially the refrain, the male claims his desire and willingness to have sex with the woman. The refrain lyrics are as follows: "I'll make love to you / Like you want me to / And I'll hold you tight / Baby all through the night / I'll make love to you / When you want me to / And I will not let go / Till you tell me to." The man slowly seduces the woman, always telling her that she can have whatever she desires from him physically: "Baby tonight is your night / And I will do you right / Just make a wish on your night / Anything that you ask / I will give you the love of your life."

The male singer in the song "I'll Make Love to You" treats his female lover to a night of passion. Again, while he tells the woman she can have anything sexual she desires ("Girl your wish is my command / I submit to your demands / I'll do anything, girl you need only ask"), he repeatedly commands her to do what *he* wants: "Pour the wine, light the fire / Girl relax, let's go slow / Throw your clothes on the floor." This story about a romantic relationship revolves around the partners' physical, sexual contact.

In Janet Jackson's song "That's the Way Love Goes," she attempts to define love and the workings of romantic relationships. The song title, "That's the Way Love Goes," is repeated at least 11 times throughout the piece and can thus be considered a key phrase. Each time the phrase is sung, it is surrounded by lyrics that describe desire, passion, and sex: "Can't you see my desire? / *That's the way love goes; That's the way love goes* / Reach out and feel my body / *That's the way love goes.*"

The singer also says repeatedly, "Like a moth to a flame / Burned by the fire / My love is blind / Can't you see my desire? / That's the way love goes." Thus, she describes her own experiences with love and attempts to define all people's love experiences or romantic relationships according to her own. Throughout the song, the female singer tells the story of how she attempted to seduce her lover. The singer tries different forms of persuasion: "Come

with me / Don't you worry / I'm gonna make you crazy / I'll give you the time of your life / I'm gonna take you places / You've never been before and / You'll be so happy that you came / Don't mind if I light candles / I like to watch us play and / Baby, I've got on what you like." After the seduction, the singer relates the story of the actual physical romance: "Come closer / baby closer / Reach out and feel my body / I'm gonna give you all my love / Ooh sugar don't you hurry / You've got me here all night / Just close your eyes and hold on tight / Ooh baby / Don't stop, don't stop / Go deeper / Baby deeper / You feel so good I'm gonna cry." In this song, the lover tells of her sexual fantasies as they are realized and of her desire for passionate love.

The gender roles in the song "That's the Way Love Goes" contradict those in "I'll Make Love to You," for the female singer in this piece states the rules and tries to coerce her partner into bed. She says to her lover, "Come with me / Don't you worry / I'm gonna make you crazy / I'll give you the time of your life / I'm gonna take you places / You've never been before and / You'll be so happy that you came." After she and her partner engage in physical contact, the female singer says, "That's the way love goes / Dontcha know / That's the way." In these ways, a woman takes charge in her physical relationship and attempts to define (or redefine) how love works. While the gender reversal notes a woman's proactive stance on her love life, it also denotes issues of dominance and power that occur in this romantic relationship and reinforces the American ideology of necessary control and power in a relationship.

The two Mariah Carey songs, "Dreamlover" and "Fantasy," both relate stories, as well. In "Dreamlover," the female singer does not have a romantic partner but claims that she desires one, almost obsessively. She uses the key terms "I need" and "I want" to portray her desperation: "*I need* a lover to give me / The kind of love / That will last always / *I need* somebody uplifting / To take me away / *I want* a lover who knows me; *I need* you so desperately; *I need* someone to hold on to." The key terms also sound thoughts of codependency: "*I just want* someone to *belong* to / Everyday / Of my life / Always." The terms "I need" and "I want" are found six times throughout the piece. The female singer obviously is

searching for the perfect lover, a “dreamlover,” to save her from the “long lonely nights” she faces. Although it is sung only a few times, the word “dreamlover” serves as another key term in the song because of its intensity. It is the title of the song and the first word of the refrain, and the content of the entire piece revolves around the singer’s vision of an ideal partner, a “dreamlover,” who will treat her better than have past lovers. This “dreamlover” would be uplifting and give the singer everlasting love. The singer further describes her “dreamlover” in this way: “I want a lover who knows me / Who understands how I feel inside / Someone to comfort and hold me / Through the long lonely nights / Till the dawn / Why don’t you take me away.” In addition, when Carey sings, “Cause I wanna share forever with you baby,” she uses marriage-like language to describe her imaginary romantic relationship.

Issues of female weakness, helplessness, and codependency can be found in the song “Dreamlover.” In this song, the female singer basically wants a partner to arrive and take control of their relationship. For example, these lyrics show the singer’s codependence on her imagined lover: “I need a lover to give me / The kind of love / That will last always / I need somebody uplifting / To take me away / I want a lover who knows me / Who understands how I feel inside / Dreamlover come rescue me / I need you so desperately / I need someone to hold on to / I just want someone to belong to.” In these ways, the female singer craves the fairy tale ending – she wants to be rescued by a handsome lover and live happily ever after. She cannot feel like a complete person without someone else in her life. She wants her partner to be the dominant person in their romantic relationship and thus shows her weakness as a woman. These images of female inferiority and of an unrealistic, unlikely fairy tale relationship reinforce ideas of power struggles and “perfect” romantic relationships as “normal” occurrences.

Carey uses some of the same techniques in her song “Fantasy.” Again, the female singer dreams of a physical relationship with a nonexistent boyfriend. “Fantasy” and some form of the word “dream” are the most evident key terms in this song. “Fantasy” occurs four times throughout the piece; “daydreams” appears once and so does “dreaming,” making for two words

that relate to “dream” in the song. The words “fantasy” and “dream” throughout the song make the performer sound as if she thinks that she will never find a satisfying romantic relationship.

According to the story’s lyrics, the woman only dreams about an imaginary, perfect boyfriend who excites her physically: “Oh, when you walk by every night / Talking sweet and looking fine / I get kinda hectic inside; Images of rapture / Creep into my slowly / As you’re going to my head / And my heart beats faster / When you take me over / Time and time and time again.” The refrain portrays the woman’s passionate desires for her fantasy: “(But it’s just a sweet, sweet *fantasy*, baby / When I close my eyes / You come and you take me / (On and on and on) / So deep in my *daydreams* / But it’s just a sweet, sweet *fantasy*, baby.”

Some issues of dominance also arise in the song “Fantasy.” The female singer wants her pretend boyfriend to rescue her: “You come and you take me.” In this song, the female singer feels that she is not able to experience the love fantasy she sees in her dreams. While she has no real romantic partner, the female singer notes that she would want her partner to control most of their true relationship. Like “Dreamlover,” Mariah Carey’s “Fantasy” portrays the female romantic partner as weak and helpless, thus reinforcing the American patriarchal society.

The Musical and Narrative Analyses

Next, the eight songs will be examined for their musical content. In addition, descriptions of a song’s narrative – according to Fisher’s narrative paradigm theory – will be added to enhance the musical analysis. The study will incorporate some basic elements of music theory used in the songs. The musical components of the songs will be related to the text to portray how the music enriches the stories told in the songs’ narratives. Implications of the musical and narrative portrayals of romantic relationships will follow.

Portrayals in popular song lyrics and musical content can shape perceptions of romantic relationship realities. In fact, Deanna D. Sellnow writes that "Musical score functions rhetorically to enrich the lyrical message by communicating an emotional dimension in a musical work or performance" (49). Because the music itself can reinforce or contradict the meaning of a song's lyrics, the musical content strongly impacts the ultimate message conveyed. This affects listeners' attitudes or moods toward the lyrics, which in turn influence the portrayal of reality offered by the song. A dynamic interactive relationship exists between the music and lyrics of a song that together create the song's message, or emotional commentary. Thus, studying the musical content in combination with the lyrics of the eight popular songs will enhance this analysis and allow for a more thorough look at the portrayal of romantic relationships in the songs.

Overall, the eight texts studied in this analysis deal directly with stories about romantic relationships. The fact that *the* top eight popular songs from 1990 to 1995 pertain to romantic relationships implies that many popular songs address the same theme. In addition, all eight romantic relationship songs contained *stories* about the relationships that were told by the singers. The narratives took a variety of forms. If listeners can imagine themselves as the characters in the stories of the songs they hear, then what pictures of reality are those listeners receiving?

The most obvious musical element in "One Sweet Day" by Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men is its slow tempo. Tempo pertains to the rhythm of a song; it is the rate of the speed of the beat at which a musical piece is performed. Tempo generally indicates the fastness or slowness of a piece (Ferris 10). The slowness of the piece helps to express the singer's sorrow and regret for his lost loved one, and it also gives the impression that the singer is reminiscing about good times with his lover. As for dynamics, each verse is sung by just one performer, but the refrain involves all group members. A refrain is a section of melody and text that recurs at the end of each verse of most popular songs (Ferris 21). Dynamics indicate the loudness or

softness of a sound (Ferris 7). Thus, the refrain is the loudest, most emphasized section of this song; it is also repeated four times. The words of the refrain and its combined musical emphasis make it – and the hope of reuniting that it portrays – the most important part of the song. The refrain consists of these words: “And I know you’re shining down on me from heaven / Like so many friends we’ve lost along the way / And I know eventually we’ll be together / One sweet day.” In this way, the words in the refrain reinforce ideas of an afterlife and of death as a mournful but ultimately joyous occasion.

The piece begins in the key of A-flat major. A key is a tonal center, or a group of seven consecutive pitches called a scale (Ferris 17). Modulations occur in music when a song’s key changes to another, usually closely related, key. “One Sweet Day” modulates during the third verse to the key of B-major.

The two scales used most often in Western popular music are the major scale and the minor scale. Each scale consists of a pattern of whole steps two half steps arranged in a particular order to produce a particular musical mood or feeling (Ferris 17). Major and minor scales occur in different keys and thus act as different modes. The major mode and the minor mode, along with tempo and other musical elements, add color, or musical texture or emotion, to a piece. For example, Ferris says that “Many Westerners associate certain tones with particular colors. Even more commonly, ‘minor’ is perceived as ‘sad’ and ‘major’ as ‘happy’” (321). Thus, certain musical sounds evoke certain moods and attitudes in listeners.

The constant major mode in “One Sweet Day” creates a happy, hopeful, and content mood for listeners. While the song notes the pain and sorrow of the abandoned lover, it also implies that death is not a horrible occurrence and reinforces ideas of eternal life and eventual reuniting. However, some of the subdominant (IV) chords in the piece are voiced with added notes and produce a dreamy, almost impressionistic sound. The chord in measure 8 is an example of the “floaty” quality. Combined with the song’s slow tempo, the IV chords create a

dreamy-like effect. The songwriter may have purposely added such an effect to create the impression that the singer was reminiscing or dreaming about his lost love.

Next, explanations of some music theory elements will clarify terms in the preceding and following paragraphs. The first and last note of either a major or minor scale is called the tonic. The tonic note is also the name of the key in which a musical piece is based. Tonic is the home base of a song, the tonal center around which the rest of the notes are structured. The tonic exhibits the greatest centrality, stability, and finality of all the notes in a scale or a piece. The tonic chord is represented by the Roman numeral I. A chord is a combination of three or more pitches sounded simultaneously or in a broken and arpeggiated manner and conceived as a meaningful whole. The tonic chord sounds the tonal center of a major or minor key (for example, a C, E, G chord in C-major and a C, E-flat, G chord in C-minor). Most Western popular music is tonal, for it consists of a broad organization of pitches and harmonies around a central tonic (Gauldin 27; Ferris 18). The tonic, or scale degree one, is the most important note in a tonal piece.

The dominant, or scale degree five, is the second most important note after the tonic. The strongest relationship exists between the tonic triad and the triad built upon the fifth scale degree, called the dominant (a G, B, D chord in C-major). The dominant chord is represented by the Roman numeral V. The dominant triad, or three-note chord, pulls toward the tonic tone and creates a tense or unresolved sensation for a listener (Ferris 23). Following the dominant, the next-closest chord to the tonic is the triad built on the fourth, or subdominant, scale degree (an F,A,C chord in C-major), which "provides a somewhat weaker sense of drive toward the tonic chord" (Ferris 24). The subdominant, represented by the Roman numeral IV, may resolve directly to the tonic, or it may lead right through V to I. The I, IV, and V chords are important as cadences, or stopping points in music, and as harmonies throughout Western popular music. In addition, the leading tone, or scale degree seven, also pulls toward the tonic tone. The

relationships between the tonic, dominant, subdominant, and leading tone evoke emotions in listeners that reflect certain moods and attitudes on song lyrics and stories.

Finally, the musical element of harmony must be addressed. According to Ferris, "Two or more different tones sounded together produce harmony in music" (22). Harmony adds depth or musical texture to a piece. Melody and harmony work closely together. When two or more tones are sounded simultaneously, the resulting harmony may be active and tense (dissonant) or passive and calm (constant). Both consonance and dissonance are essential components of Western harmony (Ferris 22).

Understanding how music influences people's perceptions and attracts listeners is an important element of music theory. Music conveys meaning by evoking emotions, by setting aural implications or expectations and then realizing or fulfilling those aural goals in some type of resolution. For example, Burnham writes that a fundamentally satisfying procedure of tonal music is producing (or hearing) a dissonant sound and then resolving it to a consonant sound (317).

Composers and musicians use certain techniques to uphold or deviate from the norms set in the predictabilities of the implication-realization model. Says Gauldin, "Certain inhibitions momentarily block or delay the tendencies of our normative models" (463). Some of those deviations include the following: suspensions, or accented dissonance's that are held over from the previous beat and resolved downward by step (Gauldin 82); deceptive cadences, which involve a V-vi progression rather than the expected V-I progression; expanding or prolonging the dominant, in which a composer creates prolonged tension by delaying the resolution to the tonic; and other various techniques. Popular music may also include the element of musical surprise. Says Gauldin, "An abrupt, unexpected change of dynamics, texture, register, or harmony in a passage qualifies as a musical surprise" (475). In addition, the term chord progression deals with a song's chordal structure and refers to the ways in which chords move and change throughout a piece of music. Different feelings are evoked when listeners' musical

expectations are both satisfied and thwarted, so the interplay of norms and deviations in music influences listeners' moods and attitudes.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, certain qualities of the sound, rhythm, melody, and harmony of a piece are thought to provoke emotions, as well. Johnson elaborates on this idea:

"There have been many theories offered to explain the relationship between music and emotion. It has been suggested that certain qualities in the music (modality, rhythm, tempo, harmony, melody, pitch, articulation, dynamics, strong pulse, and text) are central to the expression of certain mood states. So, for example, happiness is thought to be expressed by music in a major key, with fast tempos and simple, constant harmonies. Numerous experiments have indicated that people tend to agree consistently on the emotion being expressed by a particular piece of music" (15).

Finally, music's influence may also be due to its effects on people's brains. Music speaks to people in different ways – it gives messages through both its lyrics and its musical style or tune. Popular music may have such an influence on people because it forces people to use both sides of their brains when they hear and process it. Pearson, Turner, and West note the physical effects of music: The left hemisphere of the human brain processes the words and language in music while the right hemisphere handles the musical style, notes, and tune of a particular song (41). Because both hemispheres of people's brains actively function when people listen to music, people absorb more of the material and are influenced more than if they had been exposed to only words or only a musical style. Music stimulates listeners' brains. Essentially, by engaging both sides of the human brain, popular music can have a profound influence or effect on hearers. In fact, many popular songs use musical styles and lyrics to tell stories through music (Bindas 13). As was noted earlier, stories help people understand and derive meaning from their surroundings. As Snyder notes, "Music is a language of sound" (3), sound that can have real effects on people and how they view reality. These examples illustrate the potential power and impact that combined words and music can have on people.

Most of the voices and the refrain in "One Sweet Day" consist of simple chord structures. The harmonic accompaniment involves alternating A-flat and D-flat (I and IV) chords; after the key change in measure 38, the harmonic accompaniment consists of alternating B and E (I and

IV) chords. The simple chord structure produces a smooth-flowing tune that listeners remember easily. However, the logical flow is interrupted in verse 3 at the song's bridge, or section that links related sections. In musical terms, verse 3 essentially prepares the piece for the key change, which is fully realized in measure 38. In doing so, listeners hear more chordal activity, more dissonance or tenseness, and more surprises than anywhere else in the piece. This section contains vi chords (chords built on the sixth scale degree), I chords or variations thereof, V chords, and V/V chords, or secondary dominants, which ultimately pull toward the key change in measures 36-37. The bass line descends in measure 35 from an F to E-flat to D-flat, and, according to Scott Burnham, "When bass lines move, things happen" (318). The unsteady or moving bass line indicates upcoming change and causes feelings of tension or expectation in listeners. The tension is finally resolved when the refrain sounds again in measure 38. This buildup and resolution with the refrain draws even more attention to the message in the refrain.

Some instances of word painting are also apparent in the bridge section. Word painting adds texture to a musical piece. It occurs when the musical accompaniment enhances a particular word or phrase in a piece. For example, if lyrics that mention "climbing to the sky" are accompanied by an ascending melodic line, word painting exists. Similarly, if the word "loud" is accompanied by very loud music, word painting exists.

In "One Sweet Day," the melody and harmonic accompaniment of the phrase "I'll always look for a brighter day," and particularly of the word "brighter," emit a very bright and happy or hopeful sound. In addition, the words "Lord, I know" in measure 34 are accompanied by a surprising E-natural, which gives an unexpected bright sound to the word "know." This word painting implies that the singer truly knows what he speaks of or is having a sort of realization of hope as he sings.

Finally, the song ends without musical resolution on a IV chord. The last words of the song, "Sorry I never told you / All I wanted to say," are left suspended in listeners' ears in a seemingly unfinished manner. A sense of longing and wishing accompanies the end of the

song as it floats into space. Again, as in other parts of the piece, the whimsical effect may correspond to the singer's reminiscing or dreaming about pleasant memories of his lost love.

In "One Sweet Day," the singers tell stories about the partners' caring, loving relationship before one partner passed away. The singers seem to flashback and reflect on the past and place hope in their future meeting. As mentioned earlier, perhaps the songwriter portrayed the romantic relationship as she/he did in an effort to encourage listeners to never take for granted their loved ones and to make the most of their short lives on earth. In these ways, listeners should have no regrets about their lives because spending time with loved ones is important. The Christian religious tones in the piece that referred to "heaven," the "Lord," and praying might influence listeners in a positive or negative manner. While Christians, who hear such terms frequently, might not notice these words, non-Christians may take offense to them and wonder why *their* particular religious affiliation was not mentioned in the song. Thus, the religious innuendoes in the piece might sway listeners' moods and attitudes. Overall, using Fisher's concept of the narrative paradigm, the story in the song portrayed narrative coherence. Like most of the musical accompaniment, the narrative had a logical flow, structural integrity, and internal consistency. Thus, depending on whether a listener finds narrative fidelity in the piece and can relate to the story, the song is potentially quite believable. This text seems like an acceptable, realistic view of relationships to distribute via mass-mediated controls.

Whitney Houston's song "I Will Always Love You" illustrates a different type of story. In this piece, a lover seems to be saying a final, humble farewell to a partner whose standards she cannot meet. Houston's song might tell listeners that some loves last forever, and others do not. However, people need to have the strength to carry on after romantic relationships end because life does not stop with ended relationships.

Like "One Sweet Day," Houston's "I Will Always Love You" has a fairly slow tempo. The slowness of the piece helps to express the pain and sorrow experienced by the singer in her ending relationship with her lover. In Houston's version of the song, she sings a variety of

nonlinear, or sporadic, intervals, creating a choppy sound. An interval is the distance between two tones. For example, the interval between C and E is a third. The interval of an eighth, as from C to C, is called an octave (Ferris 7). Intervals produce a sound quality that is either consonant, or a passive sound that seems to be “at rest” and calm, stable, and relaxed, or dissonant, an active, unstable, unsettled, restless, and tense sound. Instead of flowing in a smooth, methodical manner, the notes and words in “I Will Always Love You” often jump to different intervals. Houston also uses her musical abilities to add runs of notes while she sings; this helps to connect the piece and make it flow more smoothly.

Like the previous song, “I Will Always Love You” includes a key change from C-major to D-major at the end of verse 3. Although the major mode is predominant throughout the piece, the singer’s voice creates a sense of wishing or longing for her lost love rather than a feeling of happiness or joy typically associated with the major mode. The song’s music is quite consonant, which gives the lyrics or narrative a matter-of-fact sense. The I-IV-V-I chord progression abounds in this piece; in fact, it occurs five times during every verse. Each I-IV-V-I progression spans only about two measures, however, and such a short motivic progression relates to the rather ephemeral phrases of text that exist in the song. For example, the breath marks and other pauses in the first verse chop the text into these short segments: “If I / should stay / I would only / be in / your way / So I’ll go / but I know / I’ll think of you / every step of / the way.” In this manner, the singer almost sounds as if she were about to cry and could only say a few words before another sob threatened. However, the choppiness of the text and of the short chord progressions is relatively balanced by the smooth, arpeggiated or rolled chords in the bass clef and by the constant major mode of the piece.

Like “One Sweet Day,” the key change in Houston’s song occurs just before the final refrain, creating tension and then resolution as emphasis is again placed on the refrain. Two measures before the sudden key change, the chord progression runs I-IV-V-V₆, with the last chord, a first-inversion dominant, creating even more tension that finally resolves on the

downbeat of the first measure of the refrain. A chord inversion is simply a chord with changing root notes. When the root of a chord (for example, C of a C-major chord) is at the bottom, that chord is in root position. When the chordal third (E of a C-major chord) is at the bottom, the chord is in first inversion and produces a less stable sound than that of a root position chord. Finally, when the chordal fifth (G of a C-major chord) is at the bottom, the chord is in an even less stable state, second inversion (Ferris 22; Gauldin 42-43).

The simple text of the refrain, "I will always love you / I will always love you," makes the point that the singer is in pain and will have trouble moving on after this ended relationship. The final refrain lasts a bit longer than the others in the piece; the same lyrics repeat for an extended time. The "I will always love you" phrase five bars from the end of the song creates some suspense or tension as the accompaniment pauses on a fermata, or temporary cessation, at a tense V6 chord. The accompaniment then completes the phrase on an unexpected non-tonic note. The song finally ends on a satisfying V-I progression in D-major with the final "I will always love you" phrase.

The song's story exhibits narrative coherence. Its three verses have a logical flow, for in verse 1 the singer announces her departure, in verse 2 she reminisces and says farewell, and in verse 3 the singer wishes her lover a pleasant life. The lyrics are structured well; the refrain enters after each verse and states the singer's heartbreak and longing for a continued relationship. The text is also internally consistent. Narrative fidelity depends on individual listeners' past experiences. Again, Houston's song reinforces ideas of dependence, since the singer appears helpless without her ex-lover. Forms of dependence perpetuate ideas of dominance and inferiority in society by creating images of "needing" a romantic partner. However, the singer must learn to let go of the relationship, and to do so she needs to focus on her own sanity.

In Boyz II Men's song "End of the Road," a male partner's monologue seems more like a plea or a cry for a dialogue with his female romantic partner. The most distinguishing musical

characteristic in the beginning of "End of the Road" is the lack of a solid chordal structure. The spoken introduction and the entire first verse seem quite dreamy or whimsical and unstable. The key signature notes that the key of C-major remains constant throughout the piece; however, stabilizing V-I chord progressions do not appear until the first refrain is sung. The chord structure in the introduction and verse 1 merely flirt with the tonic; progressions from measures 1 to 33 fall in this semi-predictable pattern: I-vi-IV-I-vi-IV-V-V/V-V-I-vi-IV-V-I. While the tonic (C-major) chord appears a few times, it does not seem established as tonic until the refrain enters in measure 33.

Perhaps the fairly confusing musical accompaniment reflects the lyrical content of the first 33 measures of the song and the rest of the verses, as well. The lyrics spoken in the introduction and the first verse contain groups of unorganized thoughts randomly tossed into the music. The unorganized thoughts may be a result of the desperation and confusion felt by the singer, who is quite upset and simply wants to continue the relationship. This song is also performed slowly and, like the other two songs, its slow tempo helps the singer drag out his painful emotions and share them with listeners.

This song also presents some word painting. For example, a type of word painting exists in the bass clef beginning in measure 25 that ultimately creates tension and expectation which is resolved when the refrain enters in measure 33. The bass notes in measures 25-28 descend chromatically, or by half-step, in this way: A, G-sharp, G-natural, F-sharp. This chromatic descent, or feeling of slowly sinking, is coupled with these lyrics: "Well, I can't sleep at night without holding you tight / Girl, each time I try I just break down and cry." The sadness and loneliness communicated in the lyrics are also communicated by the falling and unstable bass line. Thus, the musical accompaniment enhances the meaning and emotional content of the lyrics. The music and lyrics work together to create a specific effect.

However, the confusion or lack of clarity through the first 32 measures ends with a resolution to tonic and the beginning of the refrain in measure 33. Once again, the buildup of

tension portrayed beforehand brings a sense of closure to the eventual resolution in the refrain, placing an emphasis on the messages in the refrain. In addition, the refrain is louder in dynamics since the entire group of singers performs that section. The refrain presents a clear definition of tonic, and its lyrics seem more organized than those of the verses, as well. The refrain's lyrics state the singer's main points: "Although we've come to the End of the Road / Still I can't let you go / It's unnatural, you belong to me, I belong to you / Come to the End of the Road / Still I can't let you go / It's unnatural, you belong to me, I belong to you." Thus, the singer wants to work to continue the relationship. He cannot imagine ending his associations with his significant other.

Interestingly, another type of word painting exists on the second "I belong to you" phrase in the refrain. The accompaniment sounds especially stable, grounded, and assuring whenever the performers sing that second "I belong to you" phrase, perhaps indicating that the singers are confident about their feelings of love toward their partners. If the rest of the song seems confusing and illogical, the phrase "I belong to you" is its assuring and redeeming quality. That idea – undying love – may be the one thing the devastated singer is sure about.

As in the beginning, the end of the piece sounds dreamy and lost. The piece ends with a refrain, so the final lyrics are "you belong to me, I belong to you." However, the last chord, which sounds on the word "you," is an unstable and unsettling second-inversion tonic chord that floats away. The ending is not stable since no cadence exists to bring closure to the piece, and it represents the singer's sadness, loneliness, and feelings of longing.

In addition, the portrayals of codependency in "End of the Road" might give audience members the false idea that people cannot be happy or sufficient as independent persons in – or not in – a romantic relationship. Thus, the portrayals might reinforce codependency as a normal part of romantic relationships. In effect, however, codependency can create unhealthy relationships. This Boyz II Men song might present troubled romantic relationship

characteristics as normal in society. Such presentations can give listeners a distorted view of reality concerning romantic relationships.

This story lacks narrative cohesiveness. In the narrative, the male singer's words seem to spill without regard for organization. He says that they still belong together. Then he tells how he feels without her near him. He then starts talking about the love affair she had and how he forgives her. Overall, though, he wants their relationship to continue. Again, the song's narrative fidelity depends on the experiences of individual listeners.

In All-4-One's song "I Swear," the male singer relates his imagined perfect romantic relationship. Within the story, he tells of the undying love, trust, faith, and hope he and his partner will have in their relationship.

The musical feature that seems dominant in this piece relates to the cluster key term "I swear." Every time those words are sung, they occur in a specific place within the melody. The word "I" always appears on an E note in the key of D-major (and on an F-sharp when the song modulates to the key of E-major), and the word "swear" is always sung on the D that is a step from the E (and on an E in the key of E-major). In other words, the melody that accompanies the words "I swear" is a motive that makes the key term quite recognizable. A motive is a short melodic phrase that sounds incomplete or fragmentary in itself but is suitable for many kinds of variation and development (Ferris 15). The motive in "I Swear" also establishes the tonic as the notes move from an unstable scale degree two to resolve at the stable tonic or scale degree one. Thus, the music and words work together to portray the singer's promise of love and faithfulness to his imagined partner.

The tempo in "I Swear" is "moderate," or a bit faster than the past three songs. Measures 1-7 compose the piece's dream-like introduction. Measure 7 contains a dominant (V) chord that pulls toward the tonic as it resolves to begin the first verse in measure 8. Once the first verse begins, tonic seems grounded in the key of D-major. The verses contain a 7-measure musical phrase or theme that is repeated; that theme encompasses a number of

suspensions and musical deceptions that keep the music progressing forward. For example, the first three bars of the phrase portray this chord progression: I-IV6-V-I, an easily sung and easily identified tune that establishes the tonic. The bass notes of the IV6-V-I chords ascend stepwise toward tonic, adding to the tension and resolution to the I chord. Then, the next three measures of the phrase contain these chords: ii6-V-vi, or a deceptive cadence. A deceptive cadence tricks the listener into expecting a tonic chord after the dominant but sounds a vi chord instead. Thus, as the performer sings the lyrics “I know what’s weighing on your mind,” “I’ll build your dreams with these two hands,” “you’ll only cry those happy tears,” and “you won’t have to ask if I still care,” the harmonic accompaniment surprises listeners with the deceptive cadence. The deceptive cadence tells listeners to anticipate more lyrics and music before the refrain enters. The few measures at the end of each of the two verses consist of a prolonged dominant that again builds tension and anticipation that are released when the music resolves to tonic in the refrain at measure 23. In fact, the chordal structure of measures 21-23 is vii/V-V-I.

One instance of word painting occurs during the first verse when the performer sings, “You can be sure I know my heart.” The words “I know” are accompanied by a very stable IV chord in the midst of less stable or aurally pleasing vi and various chords. The consonant IV chord might suggest that the singer is confident that he “knows his heart,” and he wants to emphasize that idea. The lyrics “For better or worse, till death do us part / I’ll love you with every beat of my heart” in the refrain are also accompanied by an expanded dominant (V) chord, which works to cause tension and create expectation for the tonic that occurs with the lyrics “and I swear.” The tonic thus satisfies the expectation on those last key terms.

As mentioned earlier, this song includes a key change. The four instrumental measures between verse two and the final refrain produce a modulation from the key of D-major to the key of E-major, making the singer’s plea “I swear” sound higher and more earnest. Thus, the final extended refrain occurs in the key of E-major. The last three measures of the piece feature a

solid IV-V-I chord progression under a freestyle melodic run with the words "I swear." The song ends on a stable and resolved point.

Other narrative elements exist in All-4-One's "I Swear." The explicit portrayal of words that conjure images of marriage and wedding vows in this song might give listeners the false idea that people need to be married in order to be happy in life. The portrayal of happiness in marriage reinforces American dominant ideology because it encourages people to search for the "perfect" partner. In addition, while the male singer's romantic relationship ideas sound perfect in theory, they may not be very realistic. "I Swear" presents listeners with the ideal or utopian romantic relationship, one that likely exists in only some instances in today's world. If people hear these lyrics and think that all romantic relationships must then work exactly like the one portrayed in this song, then they may eventually judge their own or others' relationships against unrealistic standards. As Arlene Stein notes in her article "Rock Against Romance," "Music offers possibilities in fantasy that few of us can actually realize in our daily lives" (218). A nice but false representation of romantic relationships would not be healthy for listeners because listeners might judge their past, present, and future relationships on the incorrect and unrealistic "norms" they hear described in popular songs. Overall, these lyrics present narrative cohesiveness. The singer's arguments flow logically and contain structural integrity and internal consistency. The piece's narrative fidelity, however, depends on whether individual audiences can relate to the story portrayed.

The next four songs – "I'll Make Love to You," "That's the Way Love Goes," "Dreamlover," and "Fantasy" – are all immersed in themes of sexual love relationships. The songs dangerously focus only on the themes of sex and passion in romantic relationships.

The story told in Boyz II Men's "I'll Make Love to You," for example, relays how a man charms and seduces a woman to have sex with him. An important feature of the song "I'll Make Love to You" is its slow tempo. Like other pieces studied in this project, the slowness influences listeners' moods and helps them expect a love song. The song begins and ends in the key of

C-major, but many accidentals, or sharps and flats one-half step from the original tones (Ferris 5), challenge the tonic throughout the piece. Perhaps the accidentals add variety or a dramatic element to a song about love and passion.

Some note patterns exist throughout the piece, especially in the first half of the refrain. Incidentally, the note patterns, or short motives, occur in the same places where the words in the text rhyme. For example, the notes that accompany the words “love to you,” D-C-C, are repeated at the words “want me to” in the refrain. Similarly, the motive notes C-D-D occur both at the words “hold you tight” and near the words “through the night.” These instances likely help listeners remember the tune and the lyrics.

Unlike other songs, no suspension or tension is created and resolved when the refrain enters in “I’ll Make Love to You.” However, an instance of word painting occurs between the end of the first refrain and the beginning of the second verse at the words “Girl relax.” Those words are suspended on a dominant (V) chord that builds tension for an entire measure before it resolves – and relaxes – to tonic to begin the second verse.

The last shortened verse of the piece serves as the bridge that links or announces the final refrain. While the bridge section includes a number of different chords and accidentals and flirts with the idea of modulating, it ultimately remains in the original key of C-major. The bridge’s varied chord progressions create a sense of anticipation and expectation that are eventually resolved on tonic at the beginning of the final refrain.

The final refrain is similar to the other two refrains in the song except for the ending. Instead of using a stable IV-V-I or V-I chord progression to end the piece, the songwriter finishes the song on a prolonged dominant chord. Thus, listeners anticipate an end that never occurs; rather, the last ten measures of the song repeat and fade. Perhaps the music relates to the longing, yearning, and passionate anticipation portrayed in the ending lyrics “and I will not let go till you tell me to.” Overall, the song’s lyrics and musical components portray images of romance and passion.

This slow song might help to calm partners' nerves. However, listeners must realize that, unlike the portrayal in these song lyrics, sexual relations alone do not create a comfortable romantic relationship. The physical aspects of romantic relationships are only a part of the relationships themselves. Much more is involved, such as open communication, honesty, trust, respect, shared interests, and common goals and values. Since this song does not mention any other elements of healthy romantic relationships, it may offer an incomplete view of a "normal" romantic relationships and reinforce dominant ideological ideas that sex is the most important part of a romantic relationship. The lyrics in this piece exhibit narrative coherence because they tell a logical, structured, and consistent story. Again, the song's narrative fidelity depends on whether audience members can relate to the piece.

The same erotic principle applies to Janet Jackson's song "That's the Way Love Goes." Instead of a man, this time a woman tells the story of how she coerced a romantic partner into bed with her. The portrayals are similar; the man and woman simply flip roles in the songs.

Janet Jackson's song is performed a bit faster than most songs about love or romantic relationships. Although the entire song exists in a major key, many parts of the piece are cluttered with "fuzzy," or unclear, harmonies. For instance, although it is accompanied, the chords throughout the beginning section of the song are indecipherable. Thus, the lyrics "Like a moth to a flame / Burned by the fire / My love is blind / Can't you see my desire? / That's the way love goes" have an unclear harmonic accompaniment. Perhaps the fuzziness of the song's musical elements relate to the title and cluster key phrase "That's the way love goes." Aside from the overwhelming passion in the song, that key phrase is also very important and is highlighted in the music as the loudest part of the piece. The singer attempts to explain her definition of the way love happens or works, but all people have their own version or vision of love. Since love means different things to different people, this song might lack narrative fidelity, as well. The singer's experiences with love obviously involves passion and physical relationships, as the rest of the song's lyrics note. However, some aspects of love may not be

expressible through words and might thus be portrayed by unclear musical elements. The song fades away with the lyrics "That's the way love goes" repeated at the end. The piece leaves an uneasy and unclear or undefined feeling for listeners because of the unstructured harmonies and chord sequences and the unfinished, incomplete ending. The song may also leave listeners confused as to how "love goes," since much of the music and lyrics are muddled and unclear.

"That's the Way Love Goes" does not represent narrative cohesiveness. The lyrics, like thoughts of love, are a tangled mess of random, mostly erotic ideas. The words do not flow logically, a structure is difficult to determine with its lack of specific verses or a refrain, and it is internally inconsistent. Again, here is a caution to listeners: Regardless of what these song lyrics suggest, romantic relationships cannot thrive or survive solely on physical pleasures.

Mariah Carey's songs "Dreamlover" and "Fantasy" conclude the group of songs about sex. Neither song features a real, existent relationship. Rather, the female singer in each song tells a story about how her make-believe relationship would fulfill her sexual fantasies desires.

Both "Dreamlover" and "Fantasy" are performed at "moderate" tempos – not fast and not slow. The medium tempos might suggest a fanciful, playful, and even non-serious nature of the pieces. The songs are also simply structured, each using only two chords. The simple structure may demean the implications of the songs, making them seem less complex or influential than other pieces to some critics.

In focusing on each song separately, "Dreamlover" is entirely performed in the key of F-major. Its two dominant chords are F-major chords (tonic or I) and G-minor chords (ii), which alternate throughout the piece. The introductory and repeated first four measures of the song present hollow tonic chords. Hollow chords lack the third of the chord, making them sound both empty and dreamy or impressionistic. The dream-like chords appear throughout the piece, as well; measures 1, 13, and 21 contain such chords. However, the impressionistic quality of the

chords is appropriate for a song entitled "Dreamlover" that revolves around dream-like images of the perfect lover.

Various parts of the piece are syncopated in rhythm, as well. For example, measures 12, 14, 20, 22, and 23 portray rhythmic variety that might also relate to the concept of a dream. Dreams seldom follow rules or guidelines; they simply flow however they please. In the same way, the syncopated measures in "Dreamlover" might suggest a desire to work outside the standard rules of rhythm.

A short, three-note motive is repeated throughout the piece, especially near and within the refrain section. That motive consists of the stepwise ascent of F-G -A in the melody. Since F is the tonic of the piece, the motive creates tension because it involves moving away from the tonic. The motive ends on the note A, but the tension and expectations around that A want it to resolve to F (tonic), which it does in a few places in and near the refrain. For example, the lyrics at the end of verse 1 are accompanied by the motive in these instances: "Through the long, / lonely nights / Till the dawn." Then, the motives resolve to tonic on the word "away" at the end of the verse. These lyrics within the refrain are accompanied by the short motive, as well: "lover come / take me up, / take me down, / take me an..." and "need you so / Won't you please / come around / 'cause I want." Each group of motives is resolved to tonic at the end of its section. The short motive serves to build and release tension throughout the piece, keeping listeners interested and alert. It also makes the tune easy to recognize and remember. The piece ends on a stable tonic chord with these words: "Won't you please come around / 'Cause I want to share forever with you, baby." The final lyrics describe the singer's plea for her dreamlover to find and rescue her.

In contrast, "Fantasy" is performed entirely in the key of G-major and alternates between its two chords, G-major and E-minor (I and vi, respectively). The music in the song is also unsettled and fantasy-like, even more so than "Dreamlover." Again, the dream-like quality of the song fits its title and cluster key term of "fantasy." The piece ends on an unsettled sense

without a final cadence; it simply repeats and fades with these rather appropriate lyrics: "Feels like I'm dreaming / But I'm sleeping." Like "Dreamlover," the song "Fantasy" describes the singer's feelings toward her supposedly nonexistent but ideal romantic partner.

Once again, listeners need to be reminded that romantic relationships consist of more than physical content. In addition, the codependency, weakness, and helplessness of the females in these song stories are disturbing portrayals of women. In both sets of lyrics, the female singer wants to be rescued and taken away, showing images of women as meek, helpless, codependent beings who need to belong to or be taken away by a lover. Furthermore, why should these stories be about mere fantasies or dreamlovers? The female singers should be willing to take initiative and work on their relationships if they feel so inclined. The weak images of women portrayed in these songs are even more dangerously influential because they are sung by a woman. Carey's songs seem to support the idea that women are inferior to men and that current patriarchal societies, such as the United States, are normal because they view women as the lesser sex. These images can damage women's self-esteem and cause them to fail to reach their potential as women. Such portrayals should be constantly critiqued. The lyrics in both of these songs exhibit narrative coherence, for they flow logically and are structured and internally consistent. Again, the narrative fidelity of the stories portrayed depends on individual listeners' experiences and ability to relate to the lyrics.

Implications

A final analysis will now discuss consumption and possible implications of the mass distribution of the portrayals of romantic relationships in these eight songs.

First, to restate an idea, these eight songs are encouraging listeners to see the world or reality in a particular way through their use of lyrics and musical content. The songs are distributed to huge audiences mainly through the radio and other forms of mass media, and

mass media in America have incredible power to define reality for members of this culture. Because media have such an impact on people's lives, an examination of certain media-driven themes may show the ideas to which Americans are exposed. One prominent theme in past and present American culture is romantic love or romantic relationships. The following paragraphs describe portrayals of romantic relationships in the eight examined songs in this study.

Finally, people should remember the power of endless repetition when they either consume or critically examine any mass-mediated message. Themes such as the "norms" of romantic relationships become more potent and engraved in people's minds and beliefs the more times they hear or see them. For these reasons, the power of repetition should always be considered.

Mass media form images of romantic relationships that can serve as cultural models. According to Quinn and Holland (1987), cultural models are "presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it" (qtd. in Bachen & Illouz 284). This research analyzes whether the lyrics of Billboard's top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 might tell listeners how romantic relationships usually or should happen. In this way, this paper may raise awareness of these portrayals and highlight possible implications of the mass distribution of these popular songs.

American popular music normally does not challenge the dominant ideology in this culture. It does not force listeners to re-evaluate or question presently-held opinions in America. As a result, popular music lyrics and musical content serve as agents of the dominant ideology in this society. The themes and ideas portrayed in popular song lyrics and music reinforce current views on a number of issues, including sex roles, employment, and romantic relationships. Indeed, popular music helps to perpetuate American stereotypes in many cases

by portraying stereotypical ideas and images as “normal.” Says Orman, “Rock rarely influences attitudes but acts to reflect what is already happening somewhere in the United States or around the globe. Rock acts as a regime-maintaining institution” and rarely threatens current beliefs or cultural ideas (283). In essence, Orman encourages people to be aware of the power of popular music and to critique the messages it sends to listeners. In addition, this paper argues that popular music is *more* than a form of entertainment. In fact, messages portrayed through popular music present ideas about normalcies in society.

In sum, those who listen to popular music are exposed to lyrics that oftentimes detail elements of ideal and negative romantic relationships. The songs thus shape listeners' thoughts and behavior. Researchers have found evidence linking children's perceptions of ideal romantic relationships with those to which they are exposed through various forms of media. Therefore, in answer to Bachen and Illouz's question, “How do we develop our images and expectations of romance?” (279), media and cultural models play a large role in shaping people's beliefs. The analyses in this paper consider specific themes in popular song lyrics and musical components and their possible consequences or implications.

One general observation is that some of the lyrics used gender neutral language, and others did not. In fact, three of the studied texts did specify that the romantic relationships portrayed were male-female relationships, and the other five texts did not specify. Implications for the specific portrayals of heterosexual romantic relationships can be crucial. Simply stated, if listeners are exposed to images of only heterosexual romantic partners, people may tend to believe that only heterosexual romantic relationships are acceptable or even existent. In contrast, more mass-mediated portrayals of gender neutral language or of homosexual romantic relationships might show consumers that neither sexual preference should be inferior to the other. The unbalanced portrayal of gender-neutral and gender-specific romantic relationships in the eight songs in this analysis suggests that gender-neutral language was heard more

frequently than was gender-biased language in the top eight Billboard songs from 1990 to 1995. Thus, the portrayal of romantic relationships in these terms is fairly satisfactory.

A second general observation notes the portrayal of gender and power issues and codependency or dependence versus independence conflicts in the eight songs. Many of the songs, including "I Will Always Love You," "End of the Road," "I'll Make Love to You," "Dreamlover," and "Fantasy," display instances of codependency, gender inequality, and power imbalances. In every case, the implied female is shown as the weak and inferior partner while the implied male partner takes on the powerful, dominant role. These particular songs also deal with codependency, expressing normalcy in "belonging to" or "owning" a romantic partner. All of these portrayals are potentially dangerous because they promote patriarchal, co-dependent, and power-imbalanced romantic relationships to listeners. They do not portray stable, healthy romantic relationships as normal and therefore serve as poor models for listeners.

A third general observation concerns the portrayal of unrealistic relationships. To keep "order" in normal, healthy romantic relationships, couples must follow some "unwritten rules" which include trusting and being trustworthy, honesty, faithfulness, mutual respect, communicating openly, interdependence, and mutual love. However, as noted throughout the analyses, few of the eight songs portray characteristics of healthy romantic relationships. For example, the ideal relationships represented in a few of the eight Billboard popular songs seem virtually impossible to achieve. The relational fantasies described in some of the songs are almost impossible for most people to realize in their daily lives. People are not perfect, and most cannot constantly meet all the unwritten guidelines that pertain to romantic relationships. According to some of the eight Billboard popular songs, however, including "I Swear," "I'll Make Love to You," "That's the Way Love Goes," "Dreamlover," and "Fantasy," relationships *can* be perfect. In this way, listeners and consumers of popular music may be shown a false representation of reality through popular music that can have detrimental effects on the ways

they judge their own romantic relationships. The unrealistically high standards for ideal romantic relationships can frustrate people who attempt to make their own relationships work.

A fourth general observation notes that four of the eight songs focus on physical pleasures involved in romantic relationships. While the sexual aspect of romantic relationships is important, listeners must remember that many other elements -- including open and honest communication, shared goals and values, respect, and trust -- compose healthy romantic relationships. Songs that concentrate on the sexual aspects of romantic relationships may give listeners a limited view of the elements of "normal" and healthy romantic relationships.

A fifth and final general observation involves the consumerism-driven music industry. This section examines whether music -- particularly the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 -- promotes values consistent with consumption. Since the music industry is a business enterprise, might music promote values consistent with money, sales, and consumption?

One criticism of the music industry is the fact that it is a business enterprise and is therefore driven by sales, money, and success. Orman notes the increasing power of the popular music industry: "Popular music has become more 'popular' and omnipresent than popular music of even the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. It has become a large multinational corporate undertaking that scores billions of dollars annually for the industry" (281). The industry is market-based and controlled by a limited number of large American and internationally-owned companies. Orman describes the corporate, business-minded function of popular music: "The purpose of rock remains to make plenty of money, and the multinational conglomerates that own the recording industry are succeeding" (284). Combined with the idea of people's passive consumption of popular music, the business-like state of the music industry may be influential in creating realities for those exposed to the music.

The money-hungry characteristic of the music industry might raise more concern about popular music's effects on society. As with any profession, if artists and songwriters are in the music business for the sole purpose of making money, they may be criticized for not focusing on

the possible consequences of their work. For example, according to Patrick R. Parsons in his article "The Business of Popular Music: A Short History," popular music actually began in the late 1890s and was music designed to sell, to make a profit, and to become in demand. "The music was not necessarily a means of giving voice to any personal experience or an attempt to communicate something of cultural or social importance. It was designed to sell, and so it was designed to appeal to a mass audience" (138). Whether it is intended or not, however, popular songs are able to communicate ideas, opinions, and attitudes about life and reality to a culture of listeners. By concentrating on getting rich quickly, some creators of popular music might overlook the effects their songs and lyrics could have on listeners' views of life, the world around them, and reality.

When people consume, they often do so in an unthinking way. In other words, values reinforced in our American society through marketing and advertising strategies – including those of the market-driven music industry – encourage people to consume. Consumption is also a part of dating, another theme portrayed in popular music. According to Bachen and Illouz, dating today is equivalent to consumption in these ways: "Eating in restaurants, going to the movies, touring in an exotic country, bathing in the pool of a luxury hotel, and walking on the beach of a distant place have become the consecrated icons of romance, all promoted heavily through advertising and marketing. These icons associate the powerful themes of leisure, nature, authenticity, and luxury with the practices of consumption of tourism, the food industry, hotels and media industries" (286).

Popular song writers likely have values consistent with those of the dominant American culture, which encourage people to acquire material goods. In an unthinking and unquestioned way, then, songwriters may reinforce dominant culture by producing and selling their own musical products – and the messages within those products. Thus, in an indirect but important way, the consumption of popular music reinforces cultural values of consumption. For these

reasons, this analysis critically examines the lyrical and musical content of Billboard's top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 for their portrayals of romantic relationships.

Ultimately, then, an analysis of the lyrics and musical components in Billboard's top eight popular songs from 1990 to 1995 illustrate that the modern popular music industry may be giving listeners both realistic and non-realistic accounts of how "normal" romantic relationships function. The messages sung by Mariah Carey, Boyz II Men, Whitney Houston, All-4-One, and Janet Jackson and then mass-produced and distributed by media can influence listeners' perceptions of realities of romantic relationships. In fact, societal beliefs about romantic relationships are reflected, reinforced, and created in those eight songs' lyrics and musical content. Lull describes these ideas when he writes, "Like the content of all mass media, music contains themes that represent particular symbolic versions of reality. Youth and adults are exposed to values represented in music and, to a certain degree, integrate those themes into the substance of their everyday lives" (156-157).

Conclusion

Summary of Main Arguments

Beliefs about romantic relationships are reflected, reinforced, and created in popular music. An examination of both the lyrics and the musical components of the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 has revealed themes relating to romantic relationships. Such themes portray realistic, unrealistic, healthy, and unhealthy accounts of how romantic relationships function and how the partners think and act within those relationships. Because the messages portrayed through popular music help to shape realities and build societal norms about romantic relationships, popular songs warrant examination.

The analyses in this project are based on specific concepts relating to the social constructionist view of society and communication. According to this conceptual framework, the people of a culture define their ideas of reality and truth by the ways in which they communicate about life and their surroundings. The ideas of theorists Kenneth Burke and Walter Fisher support social constructionism and are thus used to examine the popular songs in this study.

Kenneth Burke's concepts of dramatism and cluster criticism reinforce the notion that humans form their reality through communication. One basic assumption underlying Burke's theory of dramatism is that humans are symbol-using beings. Humans use symbols such as words and language to describe the world around them. Thus, people's communication through symbols helps them interpret the world and conceptualize reality and truth. "Far from being a mirror of reality, language may in some respects be constitutive of reality," say Melia et al. "*Who we are as individuals and as people, how we understand ourselves to be joined in time and space, what we consider to be problems or nonproblems, all depend on the language we select to 'create,' as it were, the worlds we inhabit*" (qtd. in Burke 15).

Besides dramatism, the most relevant of Burke's specific rhetorical methods of criticism to this study is the approach of cluster criticism. Through cluster criticism, the meanings of key

symbols in a text are discovered by charting the symbols, or words, that cluster around those key symbols. By using this technique, a critic can determine the moods or attitudes present within a text. An examination of the interrelationships between clustered terms in the popular song lyrics in this study revealed a number of ideas and attitudes about romantic relationships that were enhanced by the musical content in the songs. A more detailed account of this study's results will appear in later paragraphs.

In addition to Burke's concepts of dramatism and cluster criticism, Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm theory also supports the social constructionist view of society and communication. The narrative paradigm is based on the notions that people are natural storytellers and that the narratives humans relay help to shape reality. The theory regards *all* communication as story. Fisher says that a believable or rational story results when listeners sense both narrative coherence and narrative fidelity in the message. Narrative coherence deals with the logical flow and structure that make a story probable and believable. Narrative fidelity concerns whether a listener can relate to a story. Narrative coherence – more than narrative fidelity – was used to judge the believability of the narratives presented in the song lyrics in this analysis.

Culture, ideology, and mass media also play a large role in establishing a framework of beliefs on which to base this project's analyses. Language helps to create and mold culture, which is a group of people who share a set of values and beliefs. According to Daniels and Spiker (1991), a culture consists of "a common interpretive frame of reference; a network of shared meanings" (qtd. in Wood 268). Thus, a person's culture assists him/her in defining concepts such as the elements of a "normal" romantic relationship.

The current system of beliefs within a society is that culture's dominant ideology. A culture's ideology often consists of common sense, unchallenged, and unquestioned beliefs. The portrayals of romantic relationships in popular music may support or create specific beliefs about romantic relationships that conform to or challenge our culture's dominant ideology. In

this study, the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 proved to support commonly-held beliefs in America including gender stereotypes of dominant men and weak, inferior women; power struggles within relationships, and lack of independence within romantic relationships. Such portrayals, if left unchallenged or unexamined, could enforce unhealthy and unrealistic ideas of romantic relationships in listeners' minds.

Mass media – particularly those forms that distribute popular music – help to create and reflect the ideologies within a culture. Mass media have the power to transmit messages about popular culture to an enormous amount of people who are constantly exposed to media. Mass-mediated messages are significant because they are widespread and consumed in large amounts. Thus, popular music is widely distributed and can help to shape listeners' ideas about romantic relationships.

This particular study is important because few like it exist in the fields of communication and music. While researchers and theorists have examined the structure of classical music, the impact of social movement songs, and music by popular artists such as Elvis Presley and The Beatles, no analyses exist of recent (1990-present) popular love songs. An investigation of the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995 can thus provide insight into the messages about romantic relationships that are widely distributed to audiences of all ages in America.

The analysis is grounded in specific research of eight particular texts of popular songs' lyrics and musical content. The texts are Billboard magazine's top eight most popular songs from 1990 to 1995. The texts for this study were chosen from an unlimited pool of available popular music. The particular eight songs were chosen on account of their long-standing and recent popularity and their widespread familiarity throughout America. The list of songs includes a variety of single and group artists whose songs ranked high on Billboard magazine's charts of popular songs from 1990 to 1995. These songs serve as relevant artifacts about romantic relationships that are pertinent to today's society.

The actual analyses incorporate the theoretical elements already mentioned as well as basic concepts of music theory. The analysis of the songs' musical components was included to enhance the overall examination of the music. Music is a form of human communication that, like language, helps people derive meanings from the world that they inhabit. Omitting the musical analysis would involve disregarding an important expressive and emotional aspect of the popular songs. Thus, a musical analysis is included in this study.

This research is composed of three analyses of the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995. First, cluster criticism was used to distinguish the key terms in the songs' lyrics. Next, the musical and narrative analyses were combined in one section to elicit an examination of the stories told through the songs' lyrics and the heightened expression and emotion added by the songs' musical components.

A variety of themes are reinforced in the examined songs. One general observation is that some of the lyrics used gender neutral language in discussing romantic relationships partners, and others did not. Implications for the specific portrayals of heterosexual and homosexual romantic relationships can be crucial in showing realities of socially "correct" or accepted sexual preferences. Since only three of the eight texts specified male-female relationships, gender-neutral language was likely heard more frequently than was gender-biased language in the studied songs. Thus, the portrayal of romantic relationships in these terms is fairly satisfactory.

A second general observation highlights the portrayal of gender and power issues and dependence versus independence in the examined songs. Many of the songs portray instances of gender inequality, power imbalances, and co-dependency. In most cases, the implied female partner is shown as weak and inferior while the implied male partner is portrayed as powerful and superior. Oftentimes, the women in the songs are submissive and want to be rescued by men, placing normalcies on the American patriarchal society and on the view of women as a

lesser sex. Such images can damage women's self-esteem and cause them to fail to reach their potential as women.

These eight songs also portray codependency in romantic relationships which shows normalcy in "belonging to" or "owning" a romantic partner. Codependency and lack of independence promote unstable, unhealthy relationships that serve as poor models to present to popular music listeners.

In addition, four of the eight songs concentrate on physical pleasures involved in romantic relationships. While the physical or sexual aspect of romantic relationships is important, listeners must realize and remember that many other elements help to establish intimacy between romantic partners. For example, lovers who communicate openly and honestly, share common goals and values, and respect and trust each other can have very intimate and healthy relationships. However, these essential elements of healthy romantic relationships are not mentioned in any of the four songs that focus on sex in this study. Such sexually-based portrayals might give listeners a distorted view of the aspects of "normal" and healthy romantic relationships.

A final general observation of the studied songs concerns the portrayal of unrealistic romantic relationships. A few of the songs present ideal relationships that seem virtually impossible to achieve. Because most people cannot constantly meet all the unwritten guidelines that pertain to "perfect" romantic relationships, most people cannot realize the relational fantasies described in some of the songs in their everyday lives. If listeners use these unrealistically high standards to judge their own romantic relationships, they will likely be frustrated and disappointed with their own relationships that are probably quite "normal" and realistic. In reality, romantic partners have troubles and most relationships are *not* ideal. Thus, the portrayals of perfect relationships in the studied songs can be detrimental to listeners.

The study also considers the implications of the consumer-based, money-driven music industry. In many ways, the music industry as a business enterprise promotes values

consistent with money, sales, and consumption. Consumers of popular music are likely to be unaware of the dangers of their materialistic habits.

Areas for Future Study

Overall, this study of eight popular songs is quite limited. The sampling of popular music examined in this project is only a sliver of the material available for similar analysis. In addition, the purpose of this study is mainly to raise awareness of the portrayals of romantic relationships in popular music and to address possible implications of those portrayals. The study could be changed by using different theories to analyze the popular songs. The examination could also be further developed by assessing the actual effects or influence of particular popular songs on the beliefs and actions of listeners.

This study could also be broadened by adding the opinions of the songwriters and artists involved. The examination could analyze whether songwriters purposely portray certain themes in specific ways. The analysis might also determine whether musical artists are aware of the potential impact of their songs.

Finally, future researchers could expand the findings of this research examining different genres of music and their portrayals of different themes. For example, an analysis of violence portrayed in rap music or country western songs – and a study of actual effects of the music – could elicit insightful results. Ultimately, any additional examination that would raise music consumers' awareness of the portrayals of reality in music would be beneficial.

Again, this project represents academic research that may add insight to the fields of communication and music. Future related areas of study might involve different methods or theories of rhetorical analysis, other popular music songs or songs from different musical genres, and analysis of the attitudinal and behavioral effects of the studied music. Societal beliefs about romantic relationships are indeed reflected, reinforced, and created in popular

music – particularly in the lyrics and musical components of the Billboard top eight songs from 1990 to 1995.

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